

THE TOWMAN

A NOVEL OF CANAL BOAT DAYS

By HILMA INMAN

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To

THE TOWMAN



The Towman

By

Hilma Inman



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To

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To
CORA WELLS INMAN



FOREWORD

HUMANITY throngs through the rivers of life, passing ceaselessly from the eternal sources in the mountains through the broader waterways, and at length into the ocean of a larger existence. Some there are who stay like the land-locked salmon in the inland streams and lakes. More venture further . . . some to drift aimlessly like vagrant logs; some to perish in the cataracts, or whirl to their destruction in the maelstrom; and some to reach the cherished goal.

During the endless migration mate seeks mate and friend seeks friend, but many more contacts with man and nature are for the moment. Life is consequently cyclical. In this book it has been my aim to write a cycloramic chronicle, a procession of events in the life of The Towman.

THE AUTHOR



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CHAPTER I

IN March, 1859, there was born, on the shores of Lake St. John, not far from the Kenogami outlet, some thirty miles from the village of Robervál, a son to Pierre Grenon and his wife, Marie-Blanche. Pierre was bursting with pride, although there was no one about to whom he cared to boast, unless it were the ancient Indian mid-wife . . . and, *Mon Dieu*, what sane man would wish to talk to her! So he sat alone and dreamed, and allowed pride to warm the cockles of his heart. 1859, an auspicious year surely, for had not his illustrious ancestor, that giant, Jean-Baptiste Grenon, outwitted the British at Baie-Saint-Paul just one hundred years ago? He had saved his precious hide, while his weaker companion, Tremblay, had died at the third ducking in the icy waters of the Great River. Tremblay had perished, but what matter? Why should that besmirch the record of Jean-Baptiste? A hardy tribe, too, these same Tremblays, dozens of them, living up and down the river now, from the point where the white porpoises began to bob and blow, north-east to the Saguenay, and south through La Prairie, whence they had wandered off to the States . . . a brawny, hard-headed, thick-skinned tribe! Never settlers, so much as wanderers. They were strong men, but not so strong as Pierre's great forebears!

Pierre sighed, for he knew himself to be but an obscure descendant, the son of Paul, the son of Henri, who had roved over the land and finally come to his homestead in the Lake St. John-Kenogami country. Pierre was a little man, one of the few small Grenons. He spat contemptuously into the fire. He resembled his mother's race and he resented it.

Now he bent closer to the blaze, until its heat scorched his face. The flames licked hungrily around the wood. Earlier in the evening he had banked the fire for the night, with slow-burning hickory and birch with the bark left on. It was then Marie had called to him querulously, demanding his attention. She was restless and feverish, but no more than one had a right to expect. He was rather proud to humor her this once, upon the occasion of her suc-

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cessful delivery of his first child . . . after this . . . *eh bien, Mon Dieu!* . . . a great, strapping woman like her must be more brave! Had he not seen a squaw on march, lag behind a pace, to catch up within a few hours, her newly-born papoose tied securely to her back? *Vraiment*, Marie-Blanche was asking too much sympathy from her man . . . and yet . . . a fine woman she was, even if civilization and Pierre had spoiled her. Besides he had been scared out of his wits when she had shrieked and moaned in her labor.

Pierre sighed as he leaned forward to throw a few more sticks of spruce on the flames, and then he settled back in his chair to sit the night through, if need be, close to the old Indian woman. There she sat in the opposite corner, her shoulders huddled over her knees, her beady eyes narrowed until they were mere slits in her leather-colored face, and yet he knew very well that she was watching him like a hawk, and slept not. He crossed himself.

With a sudden movement, quick and graceful for one so old, she bent closer to the fire and stirred an aromatic brew of herbs, which simmered lazily in the iron pot, hanging on the crane. She stirred and stirred rhythmically, and she murmured an incantation, rising and falling, and ending in a harsh falsetto . . . a few guttural words, unintelligible to him. His pulse quickened, for she reminded him of something sinister, an evil spirit, the fierce tribal God of the Indians; dead, they said, but still powerful. He crossed himself again. He half believed in that rude survival of some primeval genius, which the banished Manitou had sent to prove that he still held in his terrible hands the destiny of the gaunt Laurentides. He had crushed them and molded them. He had tumbled mountains into rivers. Was not the Isle-aux-Coudres but a fallen mountain, which had sunk to the depths of the St. Lawrence and risen again, separated from the shore by a narrow strip of water? Oh, strange things happened in this land! What of the bottomless rivers and lakes?

The pleasant odor rising from the pot mingled with something noisome, emanating from the dirty garments covering the hag's ancient body. Old people often smelled that way, Pierre reflected, like mildew or dry-rot, particularly filthy old squaws sewed up in their rags against the winter. His nose wrinkled in distaste. Was it the smell of death mayhap? Just then he raised his eyes fearfully and found her staring at him, and simultaneously the wind howled through the trees, titans of the unconquered forest beyond.

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He shivered. But, yes, it was the wailing of the dead God, wandering forlornly through the wilderness and over the black waters! *Mon Dieu!* He wished for the hearty society of the parish priest. He could frighten away the evil one!

Pierre shuddered and drew a piece of homespun blanket about his shoulders. He was lonesome . . . lonesome, that was all. He wanted to talk to somebody who would understand. Most of all he wanted Marie-Blanche, but instead he must hold his breath and listen to the wind belaboring the trees. Always the trees, as far back as he could remember! They reminded him of the generations of Grenons who had been lumber-men, giants of the forest, steel-muscled, hard-headed, iron-hearted, yet all of them with a curiously sentimental streak in them. Men who could fell a pine of virgin growth in a few well-aimed blows, but who were prone to blubber over the palpitating fur of a trapped rabbit; men who could breast the formidable tide of the St. Lawrence, struggling against the ice-floes and the wintry blast, but who stood on tip-toe to kiss the first green shoots of the spruce, because the spring song in their hearts answered the bird song in the sky and trees. Ah, spring, and the pink-fleshed ouananiches leaping up the mad rivers!

Giant Grenons! Which reminded Pierre again of that first, devil-defying Jean-Baptiste, who had not only won the reluctant admiration of the doughty English captain, but before his astonished eyes had actually smashed the neck of an insulting dog of a sailor. "Ah . . . ha," chuckled Pierre proudly. "So? *Eh, bien*, his name shall be Jean-Baptiste . . . *ce petit garçon* . . . and may God give him strength and power and height . . . and height," he repeated aloud, thinking of his own small stature. "Let him chop the trees and clear the forest and wrest new acres from old Mother Nature for his *pauvre, petit père!*"

Pierre considered his boy's future. Not too much book-learning, he decided, for mind you, see what learning had done to his own brother, Joseph . . . him with the strength of a lion, a mere Jesuit friar, forever stationed in the bleak back-country among savages! Pierre felt that Joseph lived always in the shadow of death, for say what you would, he didn't trust the Indians. With a shrug of his shoulders, he dismissed his brother from his thoughts and returned with joy to his new-born son. When the boy was old enough, Pierre would teach him to fish. They would fish the waters of the two lakes, close by; then they would cross to the

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Grande Décharge, near l'Ile Maligne. There they would ride the rapids in their canoes and in the Baie-de-la-Décharge they would catch the far-famed ouananiche.* That was sport worthy of a descendant of Jean-Baptiste! Better still, sometime they would take a large picking of blueberries to the market of St. Joseph d'Alma or Robervál, together with a few skins and some pickled hog-meat, and these they would barter for a trip down the Saguenay to Tadousac. Perhaps they would stop on their way down the Deep River at the mouth of the Rivière-Sainte-Marguerite for real sport . . . salmon . . . thirty-five pounders! And pike, shad, white-fish and salmon-trout! Pierre could recall the days when the Indians used to spear the salmon. Why, they would be coming upstream in no time now, leaping through the boiling waters, teeming with wriggling bodies; clearing the falls; jumping barriers. She-bears would come lumbering down to the shores, with a cub or two, and wait patiently near the backwaters of the inlets for the fringe of struggling blue and silver bodies, crowding the creeks. As a boy, he had watched many a mother cuff sense into the brains of her offspring, and skill into his arms.

There was fishing and plenty of it, as Marie-Blanche had told him a hundred times, right here in the lake . . . even salmon, if not the big fellows . . . but wistfully he was always planning this trip down the river, always awaiting a congenial companion. Just once had he descended that great river, when he and his father had escorted Joseph on his way to join the order. Now, he knew, the time would come . . . maybe in fourteen or fifteen years, when Jean-Baptiste had grown up.

Pierre yawned, then rose and stretched himself. He tiptoed over to the bed and looked down upon the faces of the sleeping mother and the child sheltered in the curve of her arm. The soft color had come back to her face and she was breathing normally. Marie-Blanche was all right again . . . great, strapping woman! Why, she'd be up and around for the next bread-baking. He yawned again and decided to turn in. He sat for a moment on the settle and drew off his boots, then in his stocking-feet, he ambled over to the cupboard and took down a mug, which he filled from the jug of bagosse, tilting the vessel with a deft twist of his wrist and supporting it on his elbow, a trick the Grenons had brought with them from Normandy. Even little Pierre had mastered it.

* Land-locked salmon.

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Suddenly he felt the malevolent eyes of the old crone fixed upon him, burning into the back of his neck. She wanted bagosse . . . he knew. . . . All Indians took to drink, as naturally as wild-ducks to water. He might give her a swallow, and then he thought better of it. No telling what she might do before morning, with a bit of liquor under her ribs. He had seen them crazy-drunk at Robervál and Chicoutimi, running amuck and wrecking things. He raised his mug to his lips and quaffed deeply and loudly. The old woman continued to stare at him through the narrow slits of her eyes. At last, exasperated, he delved into his pocket and drew forth a blue cloth bag, half-filled with tobacco, which he threw into her lap. She nodded solemnly and snatched at it with her bony claws. From somewhere about her person she drew forth a foul-smelling pipe, which she filled, then swayed forward over her knees, crooning a melancholy dissonance against the wind.

Mon Dieu! Why didn't she stop? He couldn't quite make out whether she was singing a lullaby or muttering a long, drawn-out curse. He crossed himself furtively. Indians were strange beings . . . half-animal, he guessed . . . but smart *quelques fois!*

Now she bent over to throw some cones into the fire, which spurted up angrily then resumed its steady burning, the cones sizzling in a nest of fiery blue. The old woman gazed at them intently and commenced laboriously, with her dark index finger, to trace cabalistic signs in the air, close to her near-sighted eyes. She continued her monotonous hum, and then her voice broke out weirdly in a hollow, muted scream. She jabbered in a polyglot tongue, part French, part Huron, and sprinkled generously with a sign-language which Pierre had come to understand. "Want to know what it say?" she croaked, then grabbed almost maliciously at his arm. He yanked away from her and would have hastened out of the room, but she grasped the leg of his trousers and held on. "Sit!" she commanded, and he squatted on the settle opposite her, his knees widespread and his lumpy hands resting upon them, ready to rise and fly, if the chance were offered. She knew, and she pressed the fingers of her right hand imperiously upon his left, staying him . . . an icy touch, cold as the waters of the Deep River . . . cold as Death itself, but electric, too. Pierre shuddered. He wished to run to the little spare room, where he had been sleeping of late, and bury his head under the mound of bed clothes, but he remained and listened.

"It say . . ." she paused impressively. "It say . . . *le feu* . . .

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this papoose be great river-man. Manitou will bless him an' make him great . . . strong . . . stalwart . . . like Indian. . . ."

Pierre threw back his head and laughed hoarsely. "Stalwart like the Indian! Ho! Ho! Who ever heard of a stalwart Indian?"

"Hush," she commanded him. "You anger the Manitou! Strong . . . yes . . . stalwart like the Indian used to be before the white man come . . . Huron gliding like great swans over the water . . . tilling the soil . . . smoking pipe of peace . . . until pale-face come. Listen! The babe will be strong as Mayo, father of our race, who fought and killed the monster of the deep, and sent him to the bottom, along with the other evil ones the Manitou had hurled from the sky!"

"Stop!" shouted Pierre and crossed himself.

"And he, too, will ride on the water . . . far away. . . ."

Pierre shook his head violently and jumped to his feet. "*Non, vieille, non*, I say! He will stay here with me and till the soil and guide the plough and sow and reap. He will cut down trees and clear the land. . . ."

"It is decreed. He will follow the River of Deep Waters down to the Great River and on down to the sea, it may be . . . to cities . . . big cities," she reiterated patiently. "It is written in the flame . . . see? Water . . . always water. I see water everywhere . . . rivers made by Manitou . . . rivers made by man, and this giant sapling of yours will ride the waters before he returns to you"

"But, no. . . ."

"But, yes, for thus it is written. As a buck he will follow the waters and then he will come back, but too late . . . for you . . . too late," she prophesied, stirring up the coals.

"I won't have it that way," he faltered.

"It is written. . . ."

CHAPTER II

MARIE-BLANCHE tied the strings of her apron about her ample waist. She could feel the motions of her diaphragm, her body, soft and pliable, alive under her touch, as if it were another's body . . . rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation . . . unconscious movements which kept the breath of life in her, but always made her wonder when she came suddenly into contact with them. As she had wondered these many times when she had felt life quickening within her with each new conception. This body of hers was sacred, for it had housed so many children . . . first of all that young giant, her first-born, Jean-Baptiste. Ah, a fine, young man he was now, just seventeen! And there had followed him in rapid succession, Joseph, Henri, Lucienne, 'tite Marie, 'tit Pierre, and the baby, François.

Thus far, mother and father had been able to keep their brood at home, under their wings at night and close to their hearts by day, but she and little Pierre were watching with anxiety the growing restlessness of this great Jean. All might have been well if the company had not bought land, and crept up along the shores of the lake from Chicoutimi, bringing with it its noisy hordes of wood-choppers, its hissing saws and its acrid dust. Oh, it was bound to fill the young giant's head with fancy. But, Grande Marie concluded, Jean's father shouldn't nag. He scolded and muttered and swore at times like the snarling saws, and Jean answered him back, or worse still, glared at his father in silent contempt. Marie-Blanche knew! Why couldn't the boy see that Pierre loved him too much? He was always thinking of that prophecy of the crazy, old mid-wife. Hadn't Marie told him times enough to forget about it? A river-man indeed? On the water all his days . . . seeing rivers and seas and cities! Her heart contracted within her generous breast. She couldn't let him go! And so when he grew restless, she would invent chores. She would send him out to chop down a tree or build a shed to house her foolish turkeys; to hunt or fish, while she waited for him to come boasting back to her. Ah, Grande Marie was wise

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in the ways of men! And yet there was misgiving in her heart. The battle, once won for to-day, presented itself to-morrow to be waged all over again. Why couldn't children stay forever young?

She hurried to the open door and, cupping her hand over her mouth, she called, a clarion call, that made the wood-choppers cease their work and tilt their heads to listen. "Grand' Marie . . . she's a great 'oman!" She called, "Lucie . . . Lucie," to the north, to the east, to the north again.

"*Maman?*"

"*Vite!* Go see if the oven is ready for the baking. Then come at once to help me carry the loaves."

Lucienne, a slender girl of fourteen, ran down the yard, fleet as the wind. Little curls of dust floated from her heels like the talaria of Mercury, and purled over the ground, denuded of grass, and scratched bare by the hens. The clay oven rested upon a foundation of logs, surmounting a knoll, and looked for all the world like a mud igloo, its mouth blackened by the smoke of many fires. Lucienne dawdled before it for a long moment. Beyond her the land rose and fell in green undulations off toward the shore of the lake, blue to-day and darker blue where it receded into the distance, and, as far as the eye could perceive, bare mountains and black forests coming down to the water's edge. Lucienne knew it in all its moods . . . calm as it was to-day, reflecting the sun and the cloudless sky, and she had seen it whip itself into sudden fury, roaring, growling, spewing up boiling foam, tossing the hapless boat. That was when the Manitou shook the forest and stirred the water to its depths. Then the howling and wailing of the hurricane answered the thundering of the mad waters.

"Lucie. . ."

The girl stopped day-dreaming and hastily looked into the oven; poked at the live coals and rushed back to the house, so fast that the summer breeze whistled faintly in her ears.

"Dreaming again," scolded her mother good-naturedly, as she set about to pile the clay-colored mounds of dough upon wooden trays. Eighteen loaves they carried . . . *Maman*, Lucie and 'tite Marie. *Maman* slid them dexterously into the oven, balanced upon a long-handled, wooden shovel, and 'tite Marie hastened back to the kitchen to gather up the six loaves left behind.

The arms of the wind-mill gyrated in the sudden gust of wind blowing in from the lake. "Clink . . . clank . . . clink . . . clank," answered 'tite Marie in a gay treble. She couldn't take things

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seriously . . . neither the lake, nor the wintry blast moaning in the trees and making them all hug the fire and think of lumber-jacks caught in the blizzard, losing their way and perishing; neither bread-baking under the summer sky, nor the song of the rusty wind-mill; neither life nor death, this 'tite Marie. Always laughing, always dancing her elfin-dance, always singing her charming, challenging song. Her mother frowned, her father shook his head soberly, but her beloved Jean-Ba threw back his head and laughed at her. "Clink . . . clank . . . wish I was going fishing with them," she murmured wistfully. "First to Chicoutimi, and 'tit père has promised so many times to take me there! He says the country is a better place for growing girls . . . as if he knew! And all the bear-berries I picked, scratching my face and fingers, hoping they might take me!" she sighed. "Chicoutimi . . . I'd be content with that, and then I'd turn back . . . after waving them farewell and watching them skim in Emile's ship over the water and out of sight, then I'd turn back . . . or maybe they'd let me go on . . . down the River of Deep Waters, fishing for salmon or perhaps the great white whales." Only the other night Emile had told them, when he had sat there on the steps, spinning his yarns, that he had harpooned one of those fellows, which measured twenty-five feet from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail . . . right near Baie-Sainte-Catherine! Great sport it was, he said, to watch them blow and tumble, then rise to the surface again and plunge . . . like rotting cakes of ice. That was all Marie had heard him tell, for, at this point in his narrative, her mother had complained of *les brulots* * and summarily had bidden her prepare *la boucone* ** in the old iron pot they kept in the shed for that purpose. Of course, she had missed half the story, for when she returned Emile was smoking sleepily and her father was talking about the price of hog-meat. Emile wove fine tales . . . of fishing, hunting, whaling . . . of far-off seas and lands. How Jean-Ba's eyes shone! Maybe some fine day this grand brother of hers would sail away to sea! Maybe she would go with him! "Vite! Vite! Where is the child? Marie," called her mother. "Oh, the sailor's life is bol' an' free. . . ." Marie sang the fragment of a song Emile had taught her, as she hurried to rejoin the others.

* Peppery midge.

** Smudge-fire.

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"That ugly English song," remonstrated her mother.

Up the knoll came Pierre to speak to his wife. All these years he had waited for this day to dawn, and now he faced it with apprehension. Suppose the trip should put dangerous ideas in Jean's head, already turned by the stories the lumbermen swapped? Pierre was almost sorry he had not followed his habit of fishing nearer home . . . no better place on earth for pike and trout! He could have paddled around to the Décharges, which carry the waters of the lake into the Saguenay. And yet, he had looked forward to this chance, too, and there was no better fisherman in all Canada than Emile Bogarde. Why, they were lucky, he and Jean, for Emile had purposely brought his fishing-smack up as far as Chicoutimi. Usually he anchored off Port-Alfred, a long journey on mule-back, or by boat, skirting the lake and down the P'tit Décharge. They planned to lay by for awhile at Rivière-Sainte-Marguerite for salmon, then sail on down the river. How often he had told Jean about the great Capes, Eternity and Trinity, beetling savagely, as they towered 2,000 feet above the sable water, reflecting their vast heights to a startling depth. Their majesty had made Pierre feel smaller than ever. Thereabouts fishermen and whalers had sounded the depths with leads, but none had ever struck bottom . . . a grand and terrible river, for sure, and one upon which the old Indian god had laid his spell. Holy Saint Christophe, protect us on our journey and bring us safely back to the lake country!

Emile assured Pierre that the trip would make Jean forget his restlessness and his threats to join the forces of the lumber-king, who was fast turning the sleepy magnificence of the forests into a bee-hive of industry. Emile said that smoke lay thick over Chicoutimi and Port Alfred, and the acrid stench of wood-pulp. Primeval woodlands were being leveled in the path of men.

The Grenons were always pioneers. Years ago they had sought the open country, beyond the reach of humanity. They had penetrated this far region, ahead of the wood-chopper, but now humanity was drawing in closely. It would push them back inevitably. Pierre no longer heard the wind through the trees at night, unless he listened attentively, for he and Jean had pushed the wilderness back, too . . . he and Jean, working alone with their axes; man-power, with the aid of oxen to drag out the stumps. They had labored like draft-animals, while all about them

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men and horses and machines had mown down the forest like wheat before the scythe.

Why did Jean want to join the foreigner, with wood enough of his own to hack and hew? Why be the hireling of another, when it was to your advantage to labor for yourself? Pierre could not answer this question, but the boy knew. He was young and he knew. He would earn money which would give him a chance to get out and see the world for himself, and would bring coins to his empty pockets. He could hear them jingling against each other now. Pierre was prudent with his hard-earned cash, like the good French peasant he was. "But I want money of my own," Jean would answer. "To waste on Injun Joe's bagosse . . . sale . . . Zut!" his father exploded contemptuously. "All men drink . . . what's the harm?" argued Jean. "A man's not a man till he learns to drink!" "Out of the mouths of fools!"

So they were going. Pierre hoped that he would be able to wean Jean away from Tadousac without a struggle. Perhaps his brother Joseph would help. He was stationed for the summer with the other priests from Chicoutimi at Pointe-aux-Alouettes, across from Tadousac. Joseph was learned, and he would be able to reason with Jean . . . although . . . *ciel!* Joseph was something of a wanderer himself. Pierre mused soberly over the outcome of the trip, as he pattered about the packing of his blankets and other duffle. He fingered, untangled and examined old fishing-tackle, until Jean thought he would go mad with impatience. Jean argued that better lines could be bought in Chicoutimi; besides he wanted a new rod. He was going to spend the money he realized on the hog-meat, he said boastfully. Pierre didn't bother to answer, but marched moodily back and forth from shed to wharf.

"You'll be overloading the dory," his son complained.

"*Mais, non,*" denied Pierre stubbornly.

Marie-Blanche was returning from her inspection of the oven, and went out of her way to pass close to them. She surveyed the contents in the dory with a practised eye. "Go get the old iron-pot for the *boucone*, Jean-Ba."

"I knew Mother would make us take that! *Mais, non,* we do not need it. It will only add to the load in the boat, *ma mère*. Where shall we sit, ourselves?"

"Only to Chicoutimi will you be crowded. After that there will

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be plenty of room in the big boat. Fishing in the creeks and back-waters, you will welcome the *boucone*," she insisted.

Jean looked at her through the haze of his dreams. "Back-waters . . . creeks . . . oh . . . !" he protested scornfully. "Inland water . . . I have seen it all my life! We go to fish in the open river, maybe down to the Great River, where it flows as big as the sea. What need have we of the *boucone*? *Les moustiques* * and *les maringouins* ** and *les brûlots* *** will not breed there . . . sûrement. We are going after a bigger catch."

"Get the pot, *mon fils*," directed his mother firmly, for she could not afford to be defied before his father. "Get the pot. You will not always remain in the open river at night. Often you will seek the creeks for shelter against the storm. You will seek the shores of the inlets and there you will camp sometimes. Then you will be glad of the *boucone*. You . . . why, you fidget like the old mare under the sting of the *moustique*! I know. How many times have I placed a salt-pack upon your bites!"

"The boat will sink to the bottom if we add any more," he grumbled.

Pierre glared, speechless, at his retreating figure. Then he straightened up, wiped his brow and spat viciously upon the ground a piece of slippery elm he was chewing. "Sometimes I am minded not to take this trip. I think ever of what the old squaw said . . . 'he will follow the water always . . . down to the sea. He will seek the big cities . . . always water . . . water . . . ' *Toujours le malheureux!*"

"He will be strong . . . like the Manitou . . ." interrupted his wife.

"I remember. It was I heard her . . . I . . . !" he reminded her crossly. "He is like the ouananiche, chafing against the land which holds him within the bounds of the inland sea. Will he ever be satisfied in life? It is not as I had planned it. . . ."

"Like the ouananiche," repeated Marie-Blanche. "Sometimes, after years, it is said the ouananiche is able to break away and follow his fellows down the river to the sea . . . as if the spell be broken. Perhaps our Jean will . . . or perhaps he will return contented. Who can tell?"

* Black flies.

** Mosquitoes.

*** Peppery midges.

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"And will you not make a fuss about it?" queried her husband doubtfully.

She shrugged her powerful shoulders. "To what good? *Non*. . . . The girls are easier to raise. A word . . . and they obey . . . in time," she smiled.

Pierre could never resist her smile, so, in spite of his grave doubts, he felt suddenly in good humor again. "That 'tite Marie . . . now . . . that *p'tite fille* with her loose songs and heathen dances. And nobody to teach her! It's like sin dropping from the sky. Her prattle . . . always encouraging Jean and his wild ideas! 'Jean-Ba . . . Jean-Ba!'" he snorted, imitating her falsetto.

"But, yes . . . they are good children . . . all . . . and healthy. The Blessed Marie care for them!" she defended them, devoutly crossing herself.

"Surely . . ." assented Pierre with alacrity. But, as for Joseph, Henri and 'tit Pierre, I'll bring them up to love the land . . . but, yes, even 'tit François," he boasted.

"Then you'll take my advice and move away from the water," declared Marie almost savagely.

"Would that help, think you?"

"It might," she answered slowly, her thoughts already far away. "But even in the forest, there'd be the song of the saw and the blow of the ax. The song of the wanderer would follow us, I expect. The sea is no worse an enemy than the hirelings of the lumber-king, bawling their oaths at our very door. I can reach out and touch them, when I go to gather faggots. When I go up beyond to remove the pail of sap, and gaze down toward the edge of the lake, there they are, swarming like lice about their ugly business. I go to pick bear-berries and I see them staring at me through the bushes . . . me, who used to wander through the wilderness, filling my soul with the greenness of it . . . now I speak and they hear me. . . ."

"Huh," grunted Pierre disapprovingly. "One has to clear the land. One has to grow grain. One can't squat for a season like a dirty Indian!"

"If we moved back . . . north . . . further into the woods, away from it all, from the noise, and the men crawling like ants about their mountain of saw-dust . . . he might be contented to stay. . . ."

"Never!" Pierre refused to consider the question. "Where would we fish? The water is my life . . . the lake."

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"There'd be streams, cold and clean, dropping down the mountainside. And trout! Canada teems with fish."

"The lake is an outlet . . . I like to think of it . . . that I can go out, if I want to," acknowledged Pierre soberly.

"Bah, you . . .!"

He gazed at her defiantly.

"You . . . why, you're just another ouananiche!" she declared hotly, trying to dismiss the subject from her mind. "Mind, you bring back Jean and come back yourself, too!" she warned him. "Or else. . . . How can I farm it alone, even with the help of Joseph, Henri and the mules?" Lucie," she called. "Lucienne, how fares the bread?"

"Well, *Maman*. It browns."

Marie-Blanche started to help Pierre pack. "I will put the ham here," she said, "and six loaves of bread here. That will do you for a while."

"Better ten," he urged. "I like it fresh, and then we need buy no more till we reach Sainte-Marguerite."

"*Eh, bien*, ten. Coffee, tea, sugar, salt . . . milk. . . . After this is gone you will have to get it where you can. . . ."

"And the bagosse! Don't forget that . . . some of the five-year-old I saved for this trip."

"Bagosse? What need for that? *Hein?* Bagosse you will always get. What Canadian is ever without his bagosse? Mind, you don't let the boy drink himself sick!"

"Sick . . . Jean!"

"Bagosse," she continued to mutter. "All these giants of the woods, shouting, swearing, chopping all day . . . full of bagosse!"

"What's the matter with you? They won't hurt you. They keep their distance. They mind their business."

"Let them!" she snorted. "It is well they do."

"Is it because I go away for the first time since we were wed that you bother me with such nonsense? Have I not enough to think of?" Pierre was nettled.

"It is well they do," repeated Marie-Blanche cryptically, continuing to lay out the supplies. "Flour for flap-jacks . . . and a can of syrup. . . ."

Pierre picked up the can and held it against the light, frowning. "It is dark. . . . It is old. Give me the new."

"But I want to use this up first. I am saving this year's for the winter," she argued prudently.

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"The best is none too good for this trip."

"*Eh, bien*," she gave in reluctantly.

Jean slouched into the kitchen. "No need for us to carry so much. Emile will have stocked the boat well, never fear," he muttered. "And if he has not, can we not get everything we need in Chicoutimi? *Sâpré Jésus!* I. . ."

"Jean! *Quel blasphème!*"

"*Eh bien*, I was just going to say that I can't see where we are going to put all this truck. There will be the berries and the pork and the skins besides. I'll have to wear the skins around my neck and carry the hog across my knees. *Allons, mon père*, the wind comes up," he complained, scowling at the sky. "The lake will get rough. Let us be off soon. Come!" Jean was impatient to be up and away.

"If it gets rough, we stay till to-morrow," said his father with finality. "That was the agreement with Emile. He will wait for us."

Jean stalked out of the house, disgusted. "*Le diable m'emporte!* I can row against the wind . . ." he boasted.

"Empty talk," growled his father. "So once boasted Pierre Soulard and got his head cut off for his pains."

In spite of Jean's anxiety, the weather continued fine, and by noon, with the dory loaded to Pierre's satisfaction, they were able to start out to cover the distance of some fifty miles which lay between them and their destination. Jean took the oars and sent the boat rapidly through the black water. Pierre squatted in the stern, in too close proximity to the butchered hog and a fat, plucked goose, Marie-Blanche was sending to Emile. The sack of flour he held across his knees. He thought it would be well to get rid of the hog at once. It could not keep forever and the journey would do it no good. He turned about gingerly to look back toward the receding shore, where his family stood, waving their farewell, Joseph and Henri manfully; 'tit Pierre and 'tite Marie wistfully. Jean paused to throw aside his cap and his father watched the breeze lift the strong locks up from his head. Gracefully he bent his young strength with the current.

"Take it slowly," advised Pierre. "Do not waste your strength. We can pull up and camp along shore any time."

"But, no," laughed Jean. "Twenty-five to thirty miles I can do with ease to-day . . . and with your five, that should bring us into Chicoutimi by noon to-morrow."

"Always your boasting."

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"Remember when I raced Jacques Dubois to the Décharge!"

"In a canoe!" snorted Pierre turning his back on Jean. "We return within the month, for sure," he called out to the little group on the bank, but to those others, speedily vanishing from sight, the words came but as an echo . . . already unreal.

"Good-bye . . . good-bye," shouted Jean tardily, and his mother's heart contracted with fear.

CHAPTER III

AT Chicoutimi Emile met them and conducted them around to the wharf, off which his boat lay at anchor, a small, two-masted schooner, full-rigged, rocking gently as the waves slapped her squat hulk. She was well-stocked, as Jean had guessed, and gleaming with fresh paint. Against her shining, black body, she bore her name, emblazoned in white letters, "Towman."

Jean spelled out the letters painfully. "What does it mean?"

"It's English for a fellow drags a boat," explaining Emile and drifting into French, "I've seen them in the old countries, working like mules, bending their great bodies against the ropes and dragging the tows through the canals . . . men . . . I mean. And along towards night, when the sun was setting, they'd be moving there, black shadows, moving like apes, against the sky." He spat out his quid and Jean watched its parabolical path, rising in an arc above the deck, then falling into the water, where it was instantly swallowed. "Ye . . . ah," he continued in English. "She done a bit of it herself down below Albany last spring. Towed a string of barges a ways and I give her a new name . . . Towman."

"Towman? Must take a strong man to tow a boat! All I could do to dock against a great head-wind," he mused reminiscently, hoping to impress Emile. "Dieu! Think I could tug a boat?"

Emile laughed.

"It isn't as if I had not offered to help you," his father fussed.

"But, no, it is your holiday," declared Jean valiantly and somewhat patronizingly, too. "Me . . . I am big . . .!" he boasted.

Emile gazed off over the water, as he filled his pipe, his heart far away, hovering over the canals of France. Was he already a bit sorry that he had bothered with this fishing-trip? Suddenly he longed for the open sea once more.

"Well, let's hurry," urged Pierre, as if he had read the other's thoughts and feared he might change his mind.

"*Mon père*, let me take the berries and skins to market for you. Then I'll come back for the pork," suggested Jean eagerly.

"But . . . no . . . I'll do that, but first we must unpack . . .

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then . . . yes . . . you take the berries and pork but, *moi*, . . . I take the skins. One must bargain sharply."

Jean looked baffled. He had wanted so much to prove his efficiency before Emile. He kicked at a coil of rope, its end dangling sluggishly in the water.

Emile felt sorry for him. Not a bad boy! "Oh, let him, Pierre! He's got to get started sometime. He's a Grenon and, God knows, they drive hard bargains."

It was Pierre's turn to appear abashed. "Oh . . . well," he conceded reluctantly. "You take care of the berries and pork first, then we'll see about the skins. And mind you bring back the money. . . . No bagosse on the way! . . . Now . . . *vite!*"

Jean flew to his task, unloading the dory, working like an automaton, carrying luggage, bedding and food aboard the Towman, and stacking them skilfully under the direction of Emile. Back and forth . . . waving his father aside grandly, swinging along with a rhythmic, rolling gait he fondly imagined was like a sailor's. He picked up the small dun-colored jug of bagosse. Emile glanced at it, then grabbed it and gave it closer inspection. "*Nom d' Dieu!*" he ejaculated. Pierre was ashamed. "*Juste ciel!* And is that all your woman would let you have? Eh? Go' damn! Hardly a bellyful, an' fishin's thirsty work! Come, boy, show your guts! Go you to Pete's place and bring back a case of rye. Let's see how quick you can make the trip and back again . . . here's the gold f'r it. . . ."

"But, no!" objected Pierre, grabbing his arm. "No! He's too young. . . ."

"*Sâpré* Moses, you'll have him white-livered yet, but perhaps you're right. Stay," roared Emile, slipping the coin back into his pocket. "Stay! You're right, Pierre. Why send a beardless youth? We'll go," and throwing his arm with ready camaraderie about Pierre's shoulders, the two set off together, striding down the plank, across the dock and up the bank beyond . . . out of sight.

Jean's lip quivered. He felt deserted . . . desolate. He reflected . . . he had never seen his father like this . . . carefree . . . almost with a devil-may-care attitude . . . at least, so far as he was concerned with himself, but with Jean-Ba now . . . that was different. It was as if he had two codes: one for himself and one for his son. "Go' damn!" he'd grow up some day, if they'd only let him. He stared after them . . . peering through

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the emptiness they had penetrated, . . . thwarted, rebellious, tears in his eyes; mutiny in his heart. "Go' . . . Go' damn!" That was the oath Emile had used. "Go' damn!" He felt better.

And suddenly he perceived Emile striding back through the emptiness. "And when you've finished, you might row the dory around to César Lebrun's," he called. "He will keep it until you come back. Drag her up on the bank and turn her over. Mind you fasten her secure! Carry the oars into the shed. And . . . er . . . after that, boy, you might drive a swift bargain with the skins and the hog-meat. . . . Ha! Ha! I'll make it right with Pierre. . . . See you later . . .," and he disappeared again, singing at the top of his lungs, "Oh, the sailor's life is bold an' free. . . ."

Angry with himself, Jean shook the tears from his lashes and spat upon the deck. He took up the refrain, "Oh, the sailor's life is bol' an' free. . . . Oh . . . o . . . o." If they expected him to do all the work, why, he'd soon show them they were dealing with a man! He'd do it and do it well! They were probably off to get drunk. He'd show his father how well he could bargain!

He set about to finish his task as quickly as possible. Towman . . . a good boat, and she looked bigger when you were on her, he thought idly, as he ducked his head in order to enter the tiny cabin off deck. He saw the years ahead, moving on joyously, and he was already the sea-rover. He loved this vessel . . . she was his! He wondered where she had been and what she had seen. She rocked gently with the tide and he allowed his imagination rein. He saw her breasting the giant wave, riding the billows, her black body withstanding the blacker sea sturdily . . . and always she weathered the storm and came into port, her sails gleaming, to greet the sun. Absent-mindedly he patted the jamb of the cabin-door, shining yellow, newly varnished. He went astern and gazed over the taffrail into the dark water. Suddenly he remembered he was in a hurry. In a running jump he cleared the deck and landed on the dock. He threw himself into the dory and started upstream, abruptly changed his mind and course and headed the boat downstream, rowing swiftly with the current.

He had decided to get rid of the skins and the rest first . . . and deliver the boat later. He pulled up alongside the wharf. He shouldered his pails of bear-berries and sought out the general store, where he slammed them down before a perspiring clerk and, after some quibbling, accepted the market price . . . far below what his mother had expected, but his mother wouldn't know

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for a long time. The matter settled, he returned to the boat, whistling an accompaniment to the melodious jingle of the coins in his pocket. "But three berries and you have a fat pie," he sang.

Getting rid of the hog-meat proved disappointing. He would try Napoléon Ferry, the butcher. With the dead thing slung across his broad shoulders, he trudged up the lane and down the alley, across a rickety bridge, . . . and all the time with greasy death slung across his shoulders, the mouldy smell in his nostrils. He saw it alive again, rooting contentedly; hemmed in on all sides, its lethargic fear aroused at last; its last squeal cut off by the flow of its life-blood. *Dieu!* . . . He hated it all! This fat, old hog killed out of season! Away to the water to wash himself clean! Blithely he entered the foul-smelling butcher-shop and confronted the fat Napoléon, with his little eyes . . . "pig-eyes," thought Jean-Ba, as he threw the carcass on the battered counter.

Napoléon waved him aside. He was over-stocked on pork and no way to keep it, besides this carcass didn't look too fresh. He waved his arms as he talked, and Jean waved his. "No . . . no!" vociferated Napoléon loudly. "But . . . yes . . . an offer . . .!" insisted Jean. "No . . . *allez-vous-en*. . .!" "But—here." "But, no, I say! . . . *Allez-vous-en!*" And Jean got out.

Now . . . where to? Then he recalled a sign he had seen on his way up, "Siméon Lévy—Boucher" . . . a mere hole-in-the-wall down by the wharf, and doubtless the proprietor was none too particular. He must get rid of this load in a hurry and go back for the skins, or somebody would be stealing them. As he entered, Jean brushed past two half-breeds skulking in the door-way . . . both of them looking like chicken-thieves. He rid himself of his burden once more, and there he stood blinking, for he could scarcely see in the gloom. He felt a presence, however, and suddenly the gloom became brighter, for the Indians had departed, leaving the aperture unobstructed. "*Combien?*" inquired Jean tersely. "But . . . no," shrugged Siméon. "Come, you, no fooling! I brought this in to sell! . . . See? *Comprenez?*" "But . . ." Jean grabbed his wrist and twisted it ever so slightly. "Come across!" "*Eh, bien* . . ." whined Siméon, looking furtively past Jean. He'd get even with the young pup, never fear! What if he overpaid him a few sous? Green young Frenchy, fresh from the backwoods! Once more Jean departed gaily, jingling coins. He was glad to get out into the fresh air again, but his shirt still smelled of the dead pig. "Glad I don't have to eat him!"

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he laughed. "Oh, that *Maman*, she's got a hard head on her shoulders. And now for the skins!" He started off at a smart dog-trot and soon came within sight of the wharf again, deserted now, but for two Indians, just sneaking away. Jean looked after them sharply and then searched his boat madly. Gone! The skins were gone! What a fool he had been to leave them in the boat! Ah . . . Siméon! Up the alley after the thieves! Naturally fleet of foot, they were no match for him, and in spite of their start, he gained on them with each enormous, swift stride, and hurled himself upon them as they sprang through Siméon's door, and tried to slam it in his face. One Jean smashed under the chin, a terrific blow, which threw his head sharply against his backbone and he crumpled to the floor, where he lay among the skins. Jean stood gazing down at the prone figure, then turned to confront the other who came creeping toward him, a naked knife in his hand. He threw back his head and laughed . . . loudly, uproariously. . . . "*Mon Dieu* . . . the red-man . . . and what are you going to do with that toy? Drop it, I say . . . drop it!" He closed his fingers over the fellow's wrist, allowing the grip gradually to tighten until the man's hand hung nerveless and the knife clattered to the stone floor. Jean flung him aside and grabbed the knife. "Watch! This is a trick of the woodsmen," he boasted and stepped back a few paces. "A bull's-eye! . . . Watch!" he called, aiming for the orb of a man's profile, sketched crudely in white chalk upon one of the posts, supporting the ceiling. The knife sang through the air, cut the limned eye clean across and quivered in the wood.

The Indian withdrew into the corner; the other did not stir; and Siméon watched from behind his counter, silently, motionlessly, the basilisk. Jean approached the counter and the Jew cowered, but held his ground. "So, you told them to steal my skins, you swine?" "Oh, no, no," he whined. "But, yes, you did, and the rats ran right back here to their hole. I'll count them now and if one is missing, off with your head. Two . . . four, five, eight . . . ten, and . . . ho! ho! . . . the shrewd *Maman*! . . . puts in the lousy calf-skin, the one the moths ate up. This, my friend, you will buy . . . you will buy for its weight in gold."

"Oh, no . . . no . . . *mon ami*," begged the Jew.

"Oh, yes, *mon ami* . . .," squealed Jean in mock terror. "Come, measure it out, or I'll make the knife sing above your head."

And so Jean had his way with Siméon, picked up the remainder

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of his skins and started up the alley, when he came suddenly face to face with Emile and his father, a jolly crew of two, who hove in sight, both feeling their liquor. Emile carried a small cask on his shoulder and Pierre was bearing two jugs. "So? . . . Jean?" Emile greeted him. "*Dieu Merci!*" said his father. "Twice we have been back to the boat and we feared you were lost. What are you doing with the skins?"

"Going to sell them," answered Jean laconically.

"No . . . I shall sell them! Let me," declared Pierre, setting his jugs down in the mire.

"Oh, let him alone," urged Emile. "Let him try his luck. Eh? And who are you?" Emile had spied the Jew who was peering out from his hole.

"That's the dog who set two Injun thieves upon me. Yes . . ." said Jean. "When I have disposed of the berries and hog-meat, I return for the skins and find them gone, and these two pole-cats sneak away. After them I run and trace them to their lair . . . and behold, *mon ami*, Siméon, who has set them upon me! One I killed . . . the other unknifed . . . and I made the Jew buy the rotten calf-skin *Maman* had put in," Jean boasted.

"But, *Grand Dieu*, did you kill him?" thundered Emile. "We'd better get out of here before something happens . . . not that a dirty Injun's life is of much account . . . but . . . where is he?"

"In there . . . the meat-shop . . . on the floor. Was it wrong? I just knocked him and he fell and lay where he fell."

"The boy's too strong," explained Pierre. "But, *Juste Ciel*, what shall we do?"

"I'll take care o' this," argued Emile, shifting his cask to the other shoulder, and launching into the shop, the other two following. "Where is he? Oh . . . there. . . ." He eased the keg to the floor, knelt beside the unconscious man, felt his pulse, listened for the fluttering heart-beat. "Naw . . . naw," he said. "He's not dead . . . can't kill an Injun that easy. You . . . there, get some water and mind you bring no one else back with you."

Trembling, the Jew pointed to a rain-barrel, standing outside the door. Emile filled his cap and flung the contents in the Indian's face. He groaned and his eye-lids fluttered. "He'll be all right soon."

"Me . . . I gave him a good price for his meat, then he comes back and blames me for his skins," whined the Jew.

"Did you sell your meat to him?"

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"Yes."

"How much?"

Jean counted out the coins and showed them to Emile.

"What's the rest of it for?" demanded Emile.

"Oh, the berries and . . . well, the gold from the Jew for the calf-skin."

"Not the one with the moths?" asked his father. "*Mon Dieu!*"

"Yes."

"That is not fair," objected Emile. "Here, take this and give him back the rest. This is enough. Do not make an enemy of the man, my lad. . . ."

"But he tried to rob me."

"You got your skins back and more. Now run along and sell your skins. Go to that place next door to the market and ask for Paul Rivière. Tell him I said to treat you square. Give him your skins, take what he gives you and march back . . . *vite!* . . . We want to get started."

"I have not taken the dory to Lebrun's yet."

"Send a boy to mill . . .," grumbled his father.

"There'll be time," Emile appeased him.

"Wait!" commanded Pierre. "Where's the money? Give it to me."

"But . . ." Jean looked ready to cry.

"Let him keep a little of the gold, Pierre. He earned it. You ought to be proud of him. Give him a little money of his own. You don't want him to be dependent on you always."

"Oh, well . . . have it your own way," acquiesced Pierre, against his better judgment.

Emile picked up his keg, Pierre his jugs and Jean hugged his skins closer to him and once more they were on their way.

"*Vite . . . vite,*" Emile encouraged Jean. "Mess'll be waiting for you."

CHAPTER IV

EVENING fell before Emile got around to weigh anchor, and still he was obliged to delay. He stood at the rail, his eyes fastened, through the descending gloom, upon the path leading back to town. Jean bore the silence as long as he could. "Looking for someone?" he questioned at last, impatient to be off.

"The crew," Emile answered shortly. "Blast his dirty hide! I know . . . Pat's drunk again and Bill's stickin' by him. When Pat's drunk, he fights, and there'll be the hell of a mess! *Sâpré* Moses! I told 'em to get back here before dark." Emile stumbled over a coil of rope and swore richly . . . an oath which tickled Jean's fancy . . . swore as delicately and soothingly as a mother singing to her babe. The boy couldn't catch the words, but the sound warmed his heart's blood. Here was a man! He, Jean, would learn to curse like that!

"And shall we leave without them?" he asked eagerly.

Emile glanced at him helplessly. "Can I sail my boat without a crew? And the wind's right, too. *Sapristi!*" he growled.

Jean subsided, disheartened. He hung over the rail, gazing into the dark water. All day long he had hurried . . . first loading the boat, then rowing like a madman, hectored by a thousand importuning devils, then the unloading and loading again . . . the bickering and bargaining and subsequent fight, and even now they weren't ready to start! Always waiting . . . waiting for the goodwill of grown-ups . . . and downstream the fish waiting to be caught! No progress till to-morrow. . . .

Just as his mood was darkest, there came a loud hail from the shore, "*Holà! . . . holà!*" and another, bursting upon their ears through the darkness, and repeated by a curious, falsetto echo.

"That'll be them. *Holà,*" answered Emile, "Ye dirty blackguards! Watch your step or ye'll be coolin' your hot heads in the water."

A heavy step struck the dock, reëchoed by a lighter, then both proceeded uncertainly across the creaking plank.

"Drunk again . . . both of ye!" exploded Emile, then speaking

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almost caressingly, in a tone which belied the violence of his words, "Damn your worthless hides! I ought to leave ye here to rot."

"Naw . . . ye couldn't sail yer ol' tub without us an' ye know it!" shouted the big one.

"Blarst ye . . . naoooo," drawled the little one.

"Sure, I know," admitted Emile good-naturedly. Then he held his lantern aloft until the rays struck the newcomers full in the face. Jean caught sight of Pat, brawny, broad of shoulder, heavy of arm, with his great fists hanging half-open from their long experience with the ropes. Fat was beginning to pile thickly about the region of his waist, and his bleary eyes and coarsely veined nose and cheeks gave evidence of his dissipation, as the twinkle in his eyes attested his good humor. He regarded his captain with philosophical indifference. Bill was his antithesis . . . short and wiry, a spider of a man, possessing all the cockney shrewdness and cockiness.

Emile met their scrutiny squarely, frowning. "An' what's the excuse now? I'm waitin' to hear. Ye've got a black eye, Pat, an', Bill, your shirt's half tore off."

"Craps," said Pat briefly. "Craps with loaded dice."

"The dirty bums, an' ye let 'em get away with it? *Sapristi!* What'd ye do?"

"Cracked 'is skull, which brave deed detained us a bit."

"Blarst 'is dirty 'ide!" sighed Bill in a squeaking falsetto. "Ye see, Emile, 't was like this. . . . Pat, 'e reached for the bloke's dice, after I give 'im the 'igh-sign, an' quick as lightnin', 'e sneaked 'em in 'is trousers' pocket an' bolted! 'Git 'im, Pat! I yells. 'Git 'im!' an' with that the row started.

"Bill tripped 'im up an' I lay into 'im," Pat continued.

"Get into any trouble?" asked Emile.

"None we couldn't git out of easy."

Emile laughed. "Same's the boy here. Here, Jean! Like to busted the skull of a thievin' Injun. Jean, here's Pat an' Bill . . . two bums, I reckon, but ye'll get use' to 'em. They'll learn ye all the cuss-words ye don't know already. Keep on the right side o' Bill . . . he's the cook. Oh, Pierre . . . come abaft. This here's the crew, drunk as always, but the best crew as ever manned a ship. Boys, the wind's right. Heave anchor and ease her out into the road . . . out o' reach o' them as may want to revenge the

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Injun . . . or the crap-shootin' fool, an' we'll drop anchor for the night."

"Ay . . . ay."

Jean's heart leapt within him. To halyards! To windlass! He stumbled around, eager, constantly under-foot. The crew stood him off jovially, as they would a cumbersome cub, and slowly the little craft got under way, her sails bellying in the wind.

Pat heaved a sigh of relief, as he took his trick at the helm. "An' we're off once more. I've shook the dust o' that lousy town from me feet forever," he murmured softly. "'S help me, Gawd!"

"If'n ye 'adn't played the dice, ye'd a bin all right," mused Bill. "Jolly good thing ye 'ad me along to help ye out!"

"Shut yer face, ye galley-worm."

Jean listened, fascinated by their gift of tongue. Fragments of their conversation he was beginning to understand. "Galley . . . worm. . . ." He laughed happily. Emile and Pierre had wandered off to the hole of a cabin off-deck, but he preferred to linger with the crew, hoping they would never stop talking. They filled their pipes and lit up, and after the brief flash of red in the darkness, the maladorous smoke wafted about his head and excited his desire. He wished ardently for a pipe.

"Smoke, kid?"

"No . . . no, thanks," he refused self-consciously.

"Got a pipe?"

"No. . . ."

"Bill broke me ot'er. . . . Wait'll we git t' Port Alfred or some o' them places down th' line. Could 'a got it at Chic, had we knowed."

"'E's too young," argued Bill. "Stunt 'is growt'."

"Must be six-foot-four-five, aint ye, kid?"

"Five," acknowledged Jean, well-pleased.

"Yep . . . thought so . . . well, I figger 'baccy wun't hurt yez none."

"Aho-oy! Ain't ye goin' t' cast anchor?" yelled Emile.

"Sure. . . ."

"An' all han's turn below early, so's we c'n get an early start to-morra. See t' the lanterns, Bill."

"Ye-ah."

Nobody bothered to stand watch that first night for they were lying at anchor in an almost empty roadstead. Emile and Pierre bunked below, but after glancing up at the clear sky, sprinkled with stars, Pat and Bill decided to roll themselves up in their

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blankets on what Emile fondly called the fo'c'sle-deck, rather than go below. "Stuffy in th' bow'ls o' th' ol' gurrll," Pat grumbled.

"'Tis y'r belly's full up wid bagosse mikes ye het up," contradicted Bill. Jean stuck by his new friends. No bunk for him! Besides he had made up his mind to stay awake all night. He wrapped himself up and lay on the hatch, whence he gazed up at the stars and out at the blank wall of mountain and water. He listened to the little waves lapping plangently against the vessel, beating a rhythmic lullaby. He was alone in eternal space . . . but he called it the sea. He could hear the subdued voices of Emile and his father, then silence, and the snores of Pat and Bill. He turned over cautiously and slept.

Recalcitrant rays of the rising sun crept above the mountains, across the river, and caressed Jean's eye-lids. He opened his eyes and stared about him, bewildered by the strangeness of the place and the aloofness of the naked masts. His body was numb from the unaccustomed hardness of the bare boards. He heard the muffled snores of Pat and Bill, their noses buried in their blankets . . . then he remembered. Cautiously he unrolled himself from his blankets like the imago emerging from its chrysalis. He sat up, rubbed his eyes and yawned luxuriously. The rim of the sun slunk behind a cloud-bank and the sombre blue of sky and water seemed one, save for a wan streak of light outlining the horizon. A strange, dark hour, when nature appeared remote.

If he could locate fishing-tackle without waking the others, he would produce a fresh catch of fish for breakfast . . . a few pike or lake-trout, or small salmon, *koko*, as the Indians called them. All was yet pitch-black below and he fumbled about fruitlessly, pawing over the luggage. Of course, he cursed himself, he had forgotten to buy new tackle, as he had threatened to do. Big talk! . . . always big talk! quite as his father had said. Finally, falling by accident into Bill's little cubby-hole of a galley, he found, resting against the wall, an ancient pole, with a fair length of greasy line attached, to which was fastened a rusty hook. For bait he cut off a few small chunks of salt-pork. He crept up the ladder and sauntered around to the larboard side and standing relaxed, with one leg slung over the rail, he cast off, perfectly happy. The line drifted slightly down-stream with the current. Jean assumed the true fisherman's patience and philosophy. He didn't much care whether he caught anything or not. Sufficient that he was alone with the grandeur of the north-summer spread all around him . . .

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water to port-side, as far as his eye could reach, and on the other hand, forests and the sleeping settlement of Chicoutimi in the near-distance.

Port Alfred to-day and after that, ever moving toward the open sea, freedom from the inland waters! Salt water in his blood! At home *Maman* would be stirring; Lucie frying pork, dipped in Indian meal for the hearty breakfast, and maybe flapjacks with syrup. Presently *Maman* would be calling Joseph, who would grunt and yawn and turn over in bed, immediately to fall asleep again. Then 'tite Marie would come to tickle his feet or pull down the covers, and he would grumble, as always, and finally get up to attend to the milking. Jean gazed toward the east. The sun was crawling forward. No longer were the heavens and water one. Pale streaks of color piled up in strata, and diagonal shafts of light emanated from the blood-red sliver, still behind the clouds. "Red in the morning. . . ." It would be hot again to-day and there might be storms, thundering through the canyon of the Deep River.

A steam-whistle groaned through the silence. Always the trees and the hundreds of men summoned to chop them, saw them and send them away! If he were home now, he would be hearing the distant siren of the saw-mill . . . if the wind were in the right direction . . . reboant, reëchoing from mountain to mountain.

His line became taut beneath his nerveless hand and instantly he was on the alert. A nibble . . . a bite . . . surely . . . but, yes . . . a big one, and sportive, too! Jean played the line skilfully, enjoying the game, then at the crucial moment drew it swiftly in. He prayed it wasn't too rotten! Then, slap against the deck, a good-sized white-fish. He shrugged his shoulders . . . not bad eating, but neither trout nor salmon. He threw it in the pail at his side, rebaited his hook and cast again.

The sun was getting higher, and hunger was gnawing at his vitals. Two more fishes of this size and he would rouse the others. Early start indeed! The morning was advancing. He rolled a keg alongside the rail and seated himself upon it, his long legs dangling over, almost meeting, it seemed, the snaky ribbons of their reflections in the murky depths. Fish came nibbling avidly and deftly he pulled them in, almost without conscious thought.

At length he heard footsteps . . . Bill stumbling below . . . and later his subdued swearing, as he attempted to clean the clinkers from the cook-stove. His fire once started and the coffee on,

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Bill strolled up on deck, the stench from his pipe preceding him. There he stood, a sorry figure of man, with the glamour of night gone . . . not much of a sailor, Jean thought . . . barefooted, soiled, his pants dragged up loosely over a red flannel shirt and flapping about the ankles. A battered cap was slung over one ear. He smiled, and Jean lost his heart at once.

"Hany luck?" he inquired, lifting his cap to scratch his thin hair.

"Couple o' white-fish . . . a trout . . . and salmon. . . ."

"Here, lemme tike 'em."

"I'll dress them."

"Lets's be sociable an' do hit together. They'll be fine dipped in meal an' fried in pork-fat. I'm mikin' some corn-cakes, too. That's one thing about the river, ye can eat somethin' 'sides hard-tack an' salt-junk.

They squatted over the catch, knife in hand, beheading dexterously, slitting, removing the entrails, scaling. As each was finished, Bill washed it in a bucket of fresh lake-water. Then he carried them below, where he dipped them in meal and threw them into the fat, spluttering in the hot spider. The savoury odor made Jean's nostrils quiver. The coffee bubbled through the spout of the pot and half-lifted the lid, and Bill shoved it back on the stove. "Go call the others," he ordered, squinting out at the sun, as he stirred the corn-meal batter. "Time to get started, if'n we're ever goin' to start."

"Brought along some syrup . . . new this year. Want some?" asked Jean, gazing at the batter.

"Sure! Now this is w'at I calls mess fitten for a kink, an' no wimmen aroun' neither," said Bill insinuatingly, as Pat hove into sight. "Slep' off yer jag yet, ye land-lubber?"

"I wa'n't drunk," objected Pat.

"Nar . . . nar, ye wasn't drunk . . . so to speak! Ev'ry d'y ye'd ought to thank yer lucky stars ye got me along wid ye to keep ye out o' trouble."

"Shut up, ye palaverin' son of a sea-cook! Ye measly, little, spavined, knock-kneed varmint! Don't know how I iver put up with ye long's I have," Pat bantered. "An' don't ye be feedin' us with any o' yer maggotty meal neither, nor I'll make ye swally it hot."

"Git out o' me pantry!"

Presently Emile and Pierre joined them, the latter intoxicated with the freedom of the life he was leading. He ate heartily and

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joked lamely, like a man out of his element, but with increasing jocosity, for all that, even Jean had to admit. The boy looked at his father now and then, amazed. Was this . . . this almost human person . . . Pierre? He was so different from the self-important, morose man, father of a family, taciturn and loquacious by turns. It never occurred to Jean that his father might be showing off for his benefit, imposing an unaccustomed jocularity upon himself, in order to impress the boy.

After breakfast, with sails loosed, they tripped anchor again. Emile took the helm and headed the ship downstream. Jean had never been below Chicoutimi. A spanking breeze astern filled the sails and carried her lightly over the water. They were under way! The barriers were let down for the land-locked salmon and he went out, awe-struck, but unafraid.

Black cliffs rose from the dusky water, so high that the sky seemed to rest upon their summits. Sometimes bare, sometimes crowned with dark forests, the impressiveness of the mighty undulations inspired Jean to silence. He felt like praying. He experienced for the first time in his pagan, young life that reverential humility which takes hold of man, when he encounters his God in nature . . . to Jean, a far-away, wild God, red-skinned, perhaps, and miracle-performing, who, in some remote era had fashioned these mountains; not the benign Christ, Son of the Virgin, nor God Almighty, worshipped in song and prayer, whom he had pictured as a stern, Norman-French gentleman. Here was the manifestation of a real God, terrible . . . fear-inspiring. He had never felt the same in the stuffy chapel at St. Joseph d'Alma . . . nor yet at Robervál . . . crowded, musty rooms, stinking with smells of the cowyard and unwashed humans . . . always making him long for the sunlight. To be sure, he had gone but seldom, for the distance was so great: only when the children had been christened and occasionally when his uncle came up the river, as a visiting celebrant. Here was the real abode of God, vaster and deeper even than the cathedral of the pine-woods beyond the maple-sugar grove, high above the lake at home.

"Goin' to stop at Alfred, I s'pose?" queried Pat cautiously, knowing from the start that he was defeated.

"I s'pose ye want more w'iskey? No!" refused Emile emphatically. "Ye don't git it!"

"Oh, no . . . a pipe for the lad here," pleaded Pat.

"Just another one o' your excuses. He don't need no pipe,"

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Emile answered. "That kid's only seventeen. Lay off 'im. He'll pick up sins 'nough without your help."

"Ain't goin' to stop to fish . . . mebbe?"

"Not above Sainte-Marguerite. That's the spot we're headin' for."

Pat sighed loudly.

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!* What's the matter with ye? Take ye till then to get over your black eye."

"An' d'ye expect to fish with them rotten lines, I arsk ye?" This from Bill. "Best pull in at Alfred," he argued.

"Nobody's tellin' ye to ask me anythin'! Am I master of this ship, or you? We'll get what we need at L'Anse-St. Jean."

"That smelly hole? Doesn't call that a town, does ye? Carn't buy a decent drink there."

"Shut up! If I was a man with any guts, I'd call this damn' mut'ny! Why didn't ye bring some o' your rum back in a jug las' night . . . 'stead o' all of it in your bellies?" Emile snorted and left in disgust, blowing air through his nose with the precision of a porpoise. Jean watched him, fascinated anew. A great man, *mon Dieu!*

"St. Jean, hit is, then. I see hit in yer eye," grumbled Bill.

"I'll buy me a keg at St. Jean . . . that I will! . . . against the drought," Pat threatened darkly.

"Ye damn' fool, ye won't give in, will ye?" thundered Emile, wheeling about. "No, I'll tell ye what ye'll do . . . ye'll carry the whole keg in your stummick, like ye always do!"

"Looks like a beer-barrel naooooo," drawled Bill sarcastically.

"Have it yer own way. Ye're cap'n, ain't ye?"

"I mean to," declared Emile.

As they nosed past "Ha! Ha! Bay" Bill raised his voice and shouted an eerie, crooning tenor, and lazily Pat joined him, with his trumpeting bass. Emile sounded the fog-horn, and the mingling discordances bounded from cliff to cliff, sending back echoes, wraiths of sound. Jean joined in hilariously. They shouted themselves hoarse . . . even the sedate Pierre . . . until eventually the last, tired echo died away and the all-pervading quiet reigned once more.

Then Bill went below, to return with a grimy pack of cards. He squatted on the hatch and spread out a game of solitaire. Pat sprawled beside him, smoking and offering advice.

"Hey, you, helmsman!" called Emile. "Look to your trick.

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Take 'er around the Capes for me, while Pierre and I . . . we enjoy the beauties of nature."

"Sure," assented Pat, jumping up with alacrity.

Jean strolled over beside Pat. He continued to stare all about him, to port and starboard in quick succession, until he was fairly dizzy with the effort.

"An', Bill, ye might be thinkin' of gettin' our mess," suggested Emile, squinting at the sun.

With a negligent eye Bill traced its course also. It was crawling past the zenith. "Early yet," he concluded, returning to his game.

"Past eight bells," remarked Emile.

"Ho, well, what'll ye 'ave?" sighed Bill, getting up, "'Am an' aigs?"

"Ham an' aigs . . . is that all the 'magination ye got?" shouted Pat. "What about salt-horse an' cabbidge . . . or mebbe lob-scouse?"

"I knew ye'd be arskin' for that. Shows yer breedin'! Why ain't ye arst for duff an' 'lassis?"

"Oh, give it to 'im," chuckled Emile. "There's some apples I got las' night. What about a pie or a tart?"

"Might's well be a ol' woman . . . cookin' all the days o' me life!"

"That's what ye're hired for. Ye ain't no ornamint, ye know. That's Gawd's truth!" called Pat. "No more back-chat now, or I'll throw ye in the river."

"Nar. . . ."

"Bill, I help," offered Jean.

"No, Johnny, I don't want nobody messin' around' me galley . . . neither pilferin', I don't!" he said, glancing at Pat significantly. "Ye 'ear me, ye lumberin' lout?" and he disappeared below.

"Go to hell!" Pat shouted after him. "I jus' took one aig to sittle me stummick, an' the damn', sneakin', little ferrit knew it . . . so help me, Gawd! He counts 'is aigs!"

"Where's them cards?" called Emile. "Bill, you bring 'em back. Pierre and I, we try our luck at poker, *n'est-ce-pas*, Pierre?"

"But . . . yes. . . ."

"Keep the stakes small," advised Bill. "Being ye're both French. An' don't ye lose me cards! I can't get any others mebbe at St. Jean."

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Pat kept his eyes ahead, while Jean lolled lazily beside him. Rising on the starboard side, as the schooner plunged deeper into the channel, were three massive, gaunt architectures, comprising Cape Trinity, chiselled from living granite, bare but for the Gothic spires of trees. Pat steered closer to the shore, and Jean gazed up and up. There, riding high above his head, was a lone bird . . . the bald eagle, majestic, master of the heavens. And here was he, mere mortal man, at the foot of the dreadful abyss. God was great! The spoliation of man they had left behind them. Here were only the river and the lone bird and the vast mountains.

"Look . . . look . . . to larboard! Straight ahead . . . now!" directed Pat excitedly. "The whales! Whales!" he yelled back. "Tell 'em the whales is here! Ahoy . . . below!"

"Whales to larboard!" boomed Jean.

Emile had sprung to his feet and Bill came stumbling up the ladder, a gunny-sack tied about his middle, his hands covered with flour. "Right in the midst of me pie, too."

Emile grabbed Pierre's shoulder and pointed. "What say? . . . We bag one?"

"How?"

White "porpoises" rising, blowing, tumbling against each other across the bow, then taking a course parallel to that of the schooner, disporting themselves through the sparkling, icy waters . . . waters black in the sombre shadow of Trinity.

Emile rushed below and up again, bearing a harpoon.

"The 'arpoons!" cried Bill.

"Swing 'er alongside," commanded Emile. "To starboard . . . now . . . steady . . . hold 'er steady. *Eh, bien* . . .!" he called hoarsely.

Bill hung over him nervously. "Better launch the dinghy," he warned. "Ye carn't git clost enough. . . . It'll take yer whole len'th o' rope."

"We come closer . . . see? I'll try once from here. No time to launch the dory now. Stand by . . . Pat!"

The white bodies continued to rise and fall and rise again, while Emile stood poised, his harpoon uplifted. Jean held his breath. Then with a swift, sure aim the harpoon shot out and downward in a diagonal direction. It struck its mark and the slack line grew taut. The wounded mammal thrashed about, the caudal fin whipping the water, belly up, then back humping, head plunging . . . and at one side the ever-widening stream of red, flecking the

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waves. Jean felt ill. It hardly seemed sporting to him, destroying them and interrupting their tranquil play. Then Emile's voice came, summoning his aid, "Come here, Jean! Pierre! Help me pull 'im in! You, Bill!"

"Here . . . easy naooo . . . easy . . . 'arpoon 'im again. . . ."

"He's not worth it . . . such a little fella. He's tuckerin' out. We'll have 'im soon."

"What ye goin' to do with 'im?" asked Bill. "Hain't only about six foot. Nothin' but a calf."

"Tow 'im into St. Jean, of course. Somebody'll buy 'im."

"What for?" asked Jean.

"Blubber. . . . They'll try out the fat . . . whale-oil. . . ."

"Won't git much hoil from '*im*,'" and Bill shook his head disparagingly.

"We'll try again later," Emile promised.

"There they go . . . blowin' again," called Pat, pointing far off to leeward.

CHAPTER V

THE ship lay at anchor in the creek of St. Jean, and all hands on board were at peace with the world. Emile, because he owned and commanded a sturdy craft; Pierre with his fishing-tackle, purchased at St. Jean; Bill, admiring a brand new pack of cards on the back of which was pictured a music-hall favorite, obviously wanton, presented to him with unprecedented generosity by Pierre; Pat with a stomach comfortably full of whiskey, and a small jug of bagosse hard by. Jean sat fingering a new pipe, which he didn't dare try out in the presence of his father. He gazed into the splendour of the setting sun . . . banks of greenish-gray clouds, dipped at the edges in brazen phosphorescence. The sun, with one final burst of glory, so poignant, so strangely harmonious in its full fortissimo of color and light, seemed to crash upon the ears like music, to stimulate all the senses, before it sank heavily from sight. And suddenly the inky blackness, creeping up from the river, robbed of the half-light of the crepuscule, absorbed all at once . . . channel, mountains and sky. The darkness was absolute, and fell all about them like a blanket.

All had deserted Jean to seek comfort below. Beneath the rays of the odorous ship's lantern, in their cramped quarters, Emile, Pierre and Bill quarreled negligently over poker. Pat, gloriously drunk, had sought solitude and oblivion in his bunk. Bill had warned Jean that a storm was brewing and that he would be better off below, but doggedly, desperately, he clung to nature, now irate. He would have wished to have Emile set sail and steer her into the teeth of the tempest . . . battling with it as it came. But when he had suggested such folly, Emile had howled with laughter and had said merely, "Why?" . . . then, "You are a mariner . . . *c'est vrai!* My lad, we're just across from Sainte-Marguerite. No need to hurry. We'll be there in no time in the morning." So Jean remained on deck alone.

He peered through the gloom, striving to make out the outlines of the boat . . . masts, high stem, bow-sprit, but they had disappeared into the night. He held his hand before his eyes, but he

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could not see it. He was alone with the elements and self . . . with the inner man. Only the outer, which he saw every day, looking from within his shell, was unreal. He ceased to consider himself and thought objectively. The wind, as if scaling barriers which had held it back, came plunging, howling and shrieking, down the deep chasm and whipped the waters to fury. The forests moaned. With his ears keenly attuned since infancy to the song of forest and lake, he listened.

Thunder rolled and crashed, but it was scarcely discernible above the roar of the water. Lightning split black space. The boat rocked, and once, a wave, higher than the others, splashed over the deck and Jean felt it wash about his ankles before it ebbed away with the next lurch of the ship. He waited for the next, and the next, which came not. Obviously the little vessel was not too belaboured by the storm. She was used to it. Eventually Jean grew tired of waiting for something to happen. "*Dieu!* High seas running," he murmured to himself, shivering in ecstasy, and decided to go below.

As he passed aft, his eye caught a glimpse of the small, red light at the stern, swaying drunkenly and feeding the darkness with its friendly glow. The first drop of rain hit his cheek and hurriedly he sought shelter within. He stumbled by Emile's cabin and down the ladder. Pat was snoring stertorously in his bunk. Jean drew off his boots and socks and threw himself on his bunk, striking his head painfully. He was too long! He drew up his knees and crouched, embryo-fashion, and there, with the mildewed pillow crumpled under his head, he lay and listened to the wind whistling through the stays and shrouds, and the swish of the rain, and he dreamed that he was navigating a boat safely through a heavy sea.

He was disappointed to find everybody up and about, when he woke next morning. Pat and Bill were abusing each other colorfully while they swabbed down the deck. There were few signs of the devastation the storm-gods had wrought. Jean looked around for them . . . only the clean-washed summer-sky, blue as indigo, and the surface of the blue-black water, crinkling and sparkling. Here and there upon the shore, branches of trees had been washed up, and pieces of drift-wood, perhaps the ribs of some wrecked dory, Jean fancied. Nothing much, at any rate, and if the river held an obscure secret within its depths, there was naught to reveal it. The sky was smiling benignly once more

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and the River of Deep Waters seemed almost protective in its calm.

"Yer breakfas's waitin' for ye," Bill reminded him. "Ye'll find 'am an' johnny-cake. I set the coffee back. It was b'ilin' aw'ye."

"Wash up," commented his father coldly.

This added to the humiliation of sleeping late! Before the others, too! He poured water from the pail into the grime-stained basin, and grabbing a cake of yellow soap, he splashed and soaped his face and head freely. Suds got into his eyes and smarted furiously, adding to his chagrin. He lathered his hands and arms, and rubbed them dry on the homespun towel, as rough as sand-paper. Then he went below. Cutting off a generous hunk of corn-bread, he split and buttered it, then slapped the two sections together with juicy slices of fried ham between. With this and a tin cup, full of black coffee, he came back on deck, hurrying lest he should miss something exciting. The schooner was now leaving the region of the Little Saguenay and heading cross-stream for Baie-Ste. Marguerite, a veritable paradise for the fisherman. Here it was their plan to lay-by for a week or so, and later perhaps to sail down to Tadousac where they could visit the government fisheries and see the sights on the Great River, and possibly go down as far as Malbaie. Turning about, they would fish up the river, on their homeward journey, taking their own good time about getting back. Once back in Chicoutimi, Emile would take on his cargo of lumber and return . . . maybe down the St. Lawrence, or up, and on through the Chambly and Champlain into the States. He couldn't say.

Jean hated to think of that time. He would then be back home, trudging through the tiresome routine . . . chopping, reclaiming what rightly belonged to savage nature, sweating in summer and itching under the sting of *les moustiques* and *les brûlots*; in winter freezing his toes and fingers. And never two sous to jingle against each other in his empty pockets! God, what a life!

Subconsciously, through a haze of regret that he could not prolong these precious moments forever, and paying but little attention to what was going on about him, Jean heard voices raised in excitement . . . questioning, reassuring, demurring . . . reassuring again . . . his father's and Emile's. Finally they arrived at some satisfactory conclusion. Judging from Emile's jovial laugh, his father had consented to follow his decision. As he and Bill started to trim the jib, Emile called out an order to Pat and

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suddenly, almost at the mouth of Baie-Ste. Marguerite, the lugger veered sharply and changed her course downstream once more. "Not Marguerite? But, why not?" Jean inquired. "Tadousac? Hein? And why? *C'est bon . . . bon!*" And he shook off his pessimism. "Where do you go—where?" he cupped his hand over his mouth and shouted in Pat's direction. He shouted for joy.

"Gawd, what a voice! He'd make a champeen hog-caller. . . ."

"Or an op'ry singer," amended Bill.

"G'wan! Tadousac, me boy, Tadousac we're headin' fer," Pat called back.

Jean ran to Emile's side. "Why?" he cried.

"We talked it over and decided to pay Joseph a visit first. I told Pierre there was no hurry. Have we not all the time in the world? Yesterday folks at St. Jean told of a new steamer they transport to the Champlain. They built her in the shipyards in Philadelphia . . . in the States . . . and they bring her up by sea, up the Great River to Montreal, then through the Chambly to the Champlain . . . an' Whitehall. She's loading wood. If we hasten we may catch a glimpse of her. Pierre has not seen a new steam-boat. So we hurry to see her."

"A steamer?" repeated Jean thoughtfully. "I have heard about them. They sail oceans, do they not?" he interrupted Pat. "No sails, *hein?*"

"No," Pat assured him. "Boilers inside 'er. She's propelled by steam. Keeps fellers stokin' like hell to keep 'er goin' . . . throwin' wood into them boilers, ye know."

"Could a feller like me get a job?"

"Stokin'? Sure . . . easy, but it's tough work an' hot as hell! Take me word fer it. I stoked accrost the Atlantic once."

"She is a grand boat."

"Most likely a tug . . . a propeller prob'ly. Ain't no big boats runnin' since the railroad came through in '75. Since then, the comp'ny runs these tugs to tow barges from St. Johns to Whitehall."

"Whitehall? Where's that?"

"Down in the States at the head of Lake Champlain. Ain't so much of a town, at that, but they's a canal leads down to the Hudson, an' then ye can git to New York that-a-way. New York's the greatest 'vill' in the whole world . . . 'ceptin' mebbe Dublin. . . ."

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"An-n-n Lon'on! Don't ye forgit Lon'on, ye big-mouthed Irish-man!" Bill warned him.

"Aw . . . an' Lon'on! Why, blimme, I forgot ye was around. I was about to add Lon'on," he bowed grandiloquently.

"Johnny, ye'd ought to go to Lon'on."

"What about New York?"

"Don't be puttin' notions into 'is 'ead," grumbled Bill.

"But I want to go some time," declared Jean earnestly.

"In other words, ye mind yer own bizz'ness," Pat shouted after Bill, who swayed aft with the rolling of the boat.

As the Towman rounded the point and came within view of the wharf, all hands caught sight of the steamer, not too large and neatly compact, riding her anchor. Emile read her name aloud, "S. S. Quaker Lady."* At the water's edge, the village looked significantly man-made to Jean. It rested upon a sort of plateau, sliced, as it were, from the living rock, then carefully levelled off. Lumbermen had shaved a broad path through the bristling spires of the forest; and enterprising city-folk had built a grand, new hotel. Beyond, Jean caught a vista of the open water . . . nearly twenty miles across at this point, gray-green, billowing like the ocean. His heart expanded and his throat filled. At last . . . freedom! He was ready to jump on the dock and leave the others unceremoniously.

But, no, the schooner sidled near the dock, then away and dropped anchor in the choppy waters of the bay. Then Emile gave orders to launch the ship's dinghy, swinging from her davits. They would go ashore to inspect at closer quarters the steamer and the crowd she had spilled out upon the wharf. Jean and Pat manned the boat and brought her speedily to shore, where they secured her painter to a pile and scrambled out, swinging along rapidly, shoulder to shoulder. "Wimmen," sighed Pat. "Humph . . . you . . . sapristi!" snorted Emile, puffing behind them. "What does he say?" asked Pierre. "Nothing," Emile assured him. "Seeing the sights." "Yar . . . wimmen!" echoed little Bill, bringing up the rear. "Just to rub shoulders with them . . . with them all . . . for they have seen the world," thought Jean.

There on the dock they encountered a heterogeneous crowd, ship's officers; crew; stevedores, whose meagre garments clung to their burly bodies, revealing primitive strength beneath them; two

* Choice of name factitious.

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or three fine ladies; a suave gentleman or two; a few nondescript natives; and a gaunt, old squaw, squatting in the furthest corner, out of the wind. She was selling crudely beaded moccasins and baskets of scented grass . . . bickering monotonously over prices, but always acquiescing in the end and handing over her wares. As Jean watched, he saw her reach out a bony hand and touch the fine stuff of the youngest lady's gown . . . violet, it was, of softest wool, trimmed with bands of lilac-colored velvet here and there, and fastened close at the neck with a fichu of creamy lace. It billowed about her hips, and thence the skirt hung in numerous ruffles of pansy taffeta, shot through with green. Jean stared. He had never seen her equal, nor, in fact, the equal of her gown. And, as he gazed, he saw the bony, tobacco-colored hand reach out once again and finger the material. The young woman, blond beneath her violet bonnet as a yellow daisy, pouted, raised her arched eye-brows and stared down at the squaw. "Don't," she said remotely. The Indian narrowed her eyes and glared back. Moving forward swiftly, Jean inserted himself between the two. "What d'you want?" he demanded of the squaw. The beautiful woman turned her violet eyes upon him, pursed her lips prettily and smiled. Jean felt suddenly dizzy. "Go on!" he ordered the crone in French. . . . "Get out . . .," but not very convincingly, for his thoughts were occupied with the young woman, whose smile was like the sun coming out. "But, no," droned the old woman. Then speaking in Huron, she murmured, "So it is you . . . the strong one from the north country . . . the giant who will always seek the water . . .? Many cities in many lands I see . . . and always the water. . . . God-made rivers and man-made rivers . . ." she whispered monotonously, as if speaking in a trance. "She is not for you."

"What does she say?" asked the girl.

"Oh, something about the sea . . ." answered Jean vaguely, stirred in spite of himself.

"Come, Diadama," urged one of the suave young men, in a deep voice, and he offered his arm to the girl and drew her away. "You mustn't speak to strange men," Jean heard him chiding her elegantly.

"Does it make you jealous?"

The young man dismissed such a thought with a shrug of the shoulders. "We must return to the boat. It is time for tea."

"Oh, such a giant! I adore strong men! . . . And he wouldn't

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let that old hag touch me. I wish I hadn't bought the moccasins of her. They're dirty." She fingered them gingerly.

"Throw them overboard."

"He was quite a cavalier . . . truly, Cyril. . . ."

"So you are the one who was there the night when I was born?"

Jean said.

The old woman gazed at him enigmatically and would not speak again.

"Never mind," he said, and turned to stare at the violet gown disappearing over the gang-plank.

Thus Bill found him. "Fer the live o' Mike, come on! I s'y, Johnny, they thought ye was lost! They want ye should see the 'atchery. Ye're not fallin' fer any o' them dames . . . them fancy femiles, are ye? She's old enough to be yer a'nt."

"*Merveilleuse!*" breathed Jean.

"My Gawd, struck dead by the first lidy ye seen!" Bill rolled his eyes toward high heaven.

"When this boat, she sail?" Jean asked.

"To-night . . . to-morrer . . . how'd I know? Come on. Yer Paw an' Emile's waitin' fer ye."

"Sure."

"Remember, as Pat says, they's plenty o' fish in the salt say."

"But . . . yes . . ." he sighed wistfully, as he glanced back over his shoulder.

CHAPTER VI

JEAN glanced about him indifferently. He, only a few hours ago the fisherman of whales and monsters of the deep, was suddenly no longer interested in ichthyology. He had acquired a new and all-absorbing interest . . . woman. A woman, in fact, golden, clad in an exotic color, from whom he breathed a fragrance of violets . . . violets blooming in the sheltered nooks, where the tall timber had been cleared away. "Sure," he sighed like a lover, "her eyes are like two flowers." She had moved into his consciousness to occupy his entire thought, and yet he could hear his own voice, remotely, asking stupid questions and signifying his precious attention by silly 'ah's' and 'yes's'. It would never do to let his father guess the truth. He would follow the woman. . . . Funny, wriggling mites! Not much like the great pink bodies jumping the rapids and climbing the rivers to spawn!

The universe was vast, he thought. It stretched way beyond the Great River. To-day was he interested in space without limit, infinite space at the dim extremity of water-arteries. The young woman had set his blood boiling, and the ancient squaw had stirred his longing by feeding it the fatal wafer of unrest. He could see himself floating off where the river broadened to meet the sea and the sails of windjammers billowed in the wind. No! . . . not windjammers, for they were old-fashioned, but shining, new steamers, which bore him rapidly out of sight of land. "Ah . . . yes," he muttered with emotion, and the others thought he had lost his mind. He came to suddenly, and to allay their suspicions, he bent down and peered intently at the squirming spawn in the incubators. "Yes," he repeated, as if satisfied he was correct.

"Well, what of it?" demanded his father crossly. The young idiot!

"So many . . . many!" Jean boomed.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Pat. "He's been asleep all the time."

"It's that lidy he seen back yonder," Bill explained.

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"*Sapristi!*" Emile spat out his quid. "Always a woman! Calf love!"

"Hope ye didn't fall fer any of them devil's spawn as come in on the boat!" this from Pat.

"Strumpets!" snorted Emile, which did little to ease Pierre's mind.

"Spawn," mused Jean. "Spawn means young fish . . . that's what it means. Devil is *le diable* . . . so spawn of the devil . . . but, *non*, I do not understand," and he decided to quiz Pat later.

Emile suggested that they all drop in at Madame Aurore's eating-house. There they could get such good onion soup. Emile smacked his lips reminiscently, but Bill and Pat hesitated. No . . . they had other plans. . . . "Ya!" complained Emile. "See the sights, I suppose? Bagosse, that's what you're after . . . and maybe women. W'iskey, women and a fight! Well, be off with ye!"

"Give Aurory our best."

Jean watched them depart and hung back. "I go with them," he announced wistfully.

"No, you come with us," commanded his father sternly.

"Come along," urged Emile impatiently. Emile was beginning to regret his impulsive decision to put in at Tadousac, and it over-run with strange people. And why had he ever let the young one leave the schooner? There, at least, he was safe. Puppy! He was tired of playing wet-nurse! Then the young fool had to go and ogle a fancy dame . . . just as if anyone couldn't see what she was at once! Jean would be getting them all into trouble yet, hounding those bowery belles, whose smart, young men would be sure to dump them in Montreal or Whitehall. "Come along," he repeated, grabbing Jean's arm roughly.

But Emile's black mood dropped from him the moment his eyes fell upon Aurore. "*Bonjour*, fair one!" he cried jovially. "Here I am again!" He kissed her with a resounding smack, and by way of introduction, waved his great paw in the general direction of the other two. "Meet Pierre and his boy, Jean."

Mme. Aurore laughed shrilly. "Ah, you, Emile . . . once more! My heart grows glad. Welcome . . . and your friends, too. Henriette, get busy . . .!"

Negligently Jean gazed about him and decided there was nothing here to get excited about . . . surely not the blowzy Madame with her thick eyebrows, meeting over her great nose, and her

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bluish moustache. No, nor the buxom waitress, who parried insults with the motley gathering of guests, lounging over the oil-cloth covered table, indulging in a convivial give and take. Nor the skinny, under-nourished half-breed, with the sad eyes, who padded about, executing Henriette's sharp commands. Jean edged into the seat beside Emile. The savoury odor of the soup almost made him forget his indifference. It was delicious, he could not deny that, and the beef which followed, also the deep-dish blue berry pie, which Madame served with a strong cheese from Orleans. Henriette brought schooners of beer, and Jean grew affable and began to take an interest in his surroundings.

Over at a small table, seated by themselves, away from the others, were two men he judged were ship's officers, and again there assailed him that inexplicable, ever-recurrent pain, gnawing at his vitals, that ceaseless ache to be up and away. The ship must not leave without him! He must grab the opportunity it offered. He could stoke as well as any other, for he was a giant, and for him terrific heat held no terrors.

For a sad moment he contemplated the long-anticipated fishing-cruise. Ah . . . sad to abandon it! But the next instant, he knew that, weighed in the balance, it fell far short of the glamour offered by this other chance. What cared he? He might never return to the St. John country . . . at least, not until he had made gold enough to jingle richly in his pockets. . . . Why, everybody knew the States were lands of golden opportunity!

He paused for another melancholy instant, thinking of *Maman* and 'tite Marie. Would they grieve if he did not return? And little Marie who was bold and brave as a boy . . . and venturesome, too. Ah, Marie would like to see life on the river! He must make his fortune quickly and return to them! This made him feel better.

He glanced around again . . . the officers were staring at him . . . his size probably! Suddenly they put their heads together, while Jean grew red and squirmed in his seat. He attempted to talk with Emile, but found him and Pierre deeply engrossed in parley with the evil-looking Nova Scotian on Pierre's right . . . a burly sailor-fellow, with a cast in one eye. Jean watched him ply his loaded knife skilfully between plate and mouth, a black hole in his hirsute face. The knuckles of his huge fists were swollen and knotty. Jean recognized him instantly for a slugger. He had met the type in the lake country. St. Joseph d'Alma and

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Robervál were full of such . . . itinerant lumber-jacks, with violent pasts to hide, seeking oblivion in the forest . . . murderers, perhaps, robbers, convicts, derelicts. Could they ever forget their history, he had often wondered? Their tempers were ever uncertain, touchy, easily inflamed, and, when roused, they fought like black bears, standing on their hind-legs, battling fiercely, hugging and squeezing out the life-breath.

When you could catch them in a more gentle mood, at least some of the less depraved, they would willingly show you a few scientific holds and punches, which was all Jean had ever learned of the fistic art. He wasn't bad, though. He could hold his own with any man his size. Thus ruminating, he was startled when some one tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned abruptly to face a bearded individual in a make-shift sailor-suit. Red hair and stubbly red whiskers framed his face. There was a smile in his eyes which belied his gravity. "Why not join the crew an' see the world, lad?" he asked.

Emile whirled around. "No, ye don't . . . no! Keep yer han's off the kid here! Get me?" he snapped before the bewildered boy could collect his senses sufficiently to reply for himself.

The sailor removed his cap and scratched his head, undecided whether to appear pleasant or to take a chance at knocking Emile's block off. "But . . . I only . . ." he ventured.

"Shut up! Keep yer han's off and get out o' here! This lad's with us . . . me and his father. See?"

"Have it yer own way. I wasn't aimin' to steal 'im. I was only bein' sociable."

"Well, get out," Emile growled belligerently, turning his back on the fellow.

"Have it yer own way, an' be damned!" muttered the sailor, resuming his seat at the other end of the table.

Presently the man at Jean's left leaned closer and whispered, without so much as moving his lips, "If ye'd like to join up wit' us, come around to the dock before 'leven. Ship sails at midnight. Ye see it's like this . . . cap'n's stewart got smashed up some, an' we're leavin' 'im here with Aurory's cousin, the bone-setter. It'd give ye a chance to see the country. Don't tell the ol' wind-bag on yer right nothing about it," he warned. "Understan', Frenchy?"

"Yes."

"Be at the dock before 'leven," the man repeated through his

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teeth, then he grabbed his cap, slung it on his head, pushed back his chair and left.

Jean tried to eat his second helping of blueberry-pie but somehow he could not swallow. The food stuck in his throat. What should he do? The chance, he had prayed for, had come and had taken him quite by surprise. Could he depart without a word to anyone? Not even to Pat? If he could only tell him. . . . Pat would understand . . . maybe even Bill. Tears burned in his eyes, when he visioned Pat piloting the schooner through the great cañon of the Saguenay; Emile standing on the very edge of the lugger to lunge his harpoon . . . the widening streak of red staining the water; his father growing young again and little Bill strutting about. He choked. Big ox, to blubber like this! He wiped his eyes angrily on his sleeve and pressed the image of Pat, shadowy now, already remote, into his brain . . . poor, old soak, living and drinking in the present, but with his eyes always focussed ahead of him. A grand man, Pat was!

Damn! Jean had been having a big time these past few days. He couldn't go back on them now! Why had he ever seen the steam-packet? He, the ouananiche, could wait until another chance came along. Then the ill-omened apparition of the violet-clad woman presented itself before his dream-blurred eyes. Ah . . . never . . . never turn back! His time was come! The way had opened unto him and he must go on, for thus it was written. The old woman had said so, and so Jean decided. He snatched up his mug of sour wine and drank a silent toast to his future. He shook his crisp curls and thus dislodged any doubts his conscience might have harboured still. One had to live his own life. "Let the devil carry me off," he swore softly. "Papa would have done the same in his youth . . . perhaps. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

FROM Mme. Aurore's the three moved down the sandy road, bordered on either side by rag-weed, gray with dust. Emile was directing their steps toward Archambaud's . . . "Archambaud . . . Archambaud," he sang in a sort of chantey . . . loudly, jocosely. "Archambaud, he serves the best w'iskey in Canada! Hurry, my friends, hurry!" and in march-time the two comrades and the other, separated from them by a generation, advanced through the dust. Left . . . right . . . left . . . right, and with each step Jean repeated to himself, "Get away . . . get away . . . but how? . . . how? They'll get drunk, perhaps . . . well . . . then shall I go . . . maybe."

Up ramshackle steps, onto the uneven porch, ragged at the edges and reënforced here and there with new boards. . . . Jean saw them abstractedly . . . black and yellow pine in patches . . . black and yellow. At the swinging half-doors of seasoned walnut, brought from a Five Points saloon, as Archambaud often boasted, Jean balked. "You go ahead. I wait here . . . or go back on the dock and wait," he said.

"No, come with us," dictated his father.

Jean shrugged his shoulders, put his hands in his pockets and slouched through the doors after the others. He refused a drink. "Beer?" urged Emile.

"No . . . nothing."

"Sulky?" queried Emile, nudging Pierre.

"*Grand Dieu!* He is never satisfied . . . always wishing for something . . . and when he gets it . . . no good . . . no good. The unhappy one!"

"He's young," said Emile philosophically. "Seventeen? Holy Moses, at his age I ran away on Antoine's old windjammer. . . ."

"Ah, no!" remonstrated Pierre sharply. "You put ideas into his foolish head."

"Oh, him? Why, Jean, he likes the river. . . . He has water enough on lake and river without running off to sea." Emile's eyes bulged as he regarded Jean. He whacked him lustily on the

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shoulder, then he turned abruptly. "W'iskey," he cried, leaning over the bar and pounding with unnecessary vigor on the stained marble top. "W'iskey . . . for two . . . an' make it speedy . . . w'iskey!" he reiterated.

"Ye—ah? Well, keep yer shoit on," rejoined Louis, the bar-keep, a New Yorker, who had dealt originally with the scum of Water Street . . . hard-boiled and tough. He'd show the up-country Frenchy!

"Yar . . . ye rat, blast yer dirty hide! Shut up!" bawled Emile, drawing himself up to his full and terrifying height. And spoiling for a fight or anything else which would pass the time until eleven, Jean drew near, bending over the bar, so close to bar-tender that his hot breath stirred the thin wisps of hair on the other's yellow head. He retreated.

"I didn't go fer to . . ." he whined, at the same time sticking his tongue in his cheek.

"Devil's spawn," grumbled Emile carelessly.

Jean started. There it was again! Emile had called the saloon-keeper what Pat had called the violet lady. Jean was non-plussed. Had Pat insulted her? But, no, probably he, Jean, did not understand. He turned his back on the bar and stared about him . . . only a few battered tables; saw-dust on the floor; a pair of tarnished brass spittoons by the bar-rail. Over in the corner within the shadow of the swinging-door, a man slept like a log, his head pillowed on one arm, while the other hung nearly to the floor and as limp as a rag. His woolen cap lay half-buried in the saw-dust at his feet. His legs sprawled inertly under the table. Two empty whiskey glasses stood by his elbow, and a bottle and taller glass had toppled over and drooled a sticky mess on the table-top. Blue-bottle flies buzzed noisily overhead and one lit on the man's hand. Jean turned away. Over by the windows two old men sat, silent as mandarins, and played at checkers. Existence nearing its end, they had no choice but to wait for death, so they sat apart from the stream of life and watched the human logs whirling past.

Four younger men, down from the lumber-country on a jaunt, watched the deft, slim fingers of a gentleman card-sharp, turning his clever tricks. "Now you try it," he was importuning them politely, but they hung back, either through diffidence or from a certain native sagacity, which told them to hold on to their money. At length he shrugged his shoulders and gave up. He ordered a

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Scotch, said something in an undertone to the bar-keep and laughed softly, sardonically. His laugh was like music, like the tinkling of falling glass, and something in it made Jean shiver. Louis nodded and ejaculated out of the side of his mouth, . . . something that sounded like, "Swine!" to Jean. Emile pricked up his ears but failed to catch it, for the keen edge of his hearing had been dulled by alcohol.

The suave gentleman drank his Scotch neatly, adjusted his immaculate cuffs, flecked an imaginary bit of dust from his light gray trousers, nodded solemnly to the bar-keep as he shoved his coin delicately over the counter, and turned toward the door. "T'anks, sir," murmured Louis, who stared at the coin then at the retreating figure of the gentleman. "Blimme! It's gold . . . yaller gold!" he whispered reverently. "Na—ow . . . I wonder . . . who?"

Jean yawned. There was nothing left to look at. He had half expected to find Pat and Bill here, but apparently they were seeking amusement elsewhere. Emile and Pierre were on their fourth round of whiskey, which did not mix too well with Madame's bagosse. They were getting groggy and characteristically so . . . Emile with geniality, Pierre morosely.

"Well," sighed Emile. "Let us sit down. Hey . . . you . . . behind the counter . . . bring three w'iskeys! . . . No, better make it four . . . an' hurry up!"

"Drinkin' like the cold-blooded frog he is," grunted the bar-keep.

"Ye . . . ah." Emile was quite beyond resenting any innuendoes that the other might cast in his direction.

Jean shifted his weight to his other foot. Patiently he stood by the bar and watched them. Guzzling . . . guzzling . . . all they thought of! He was losing his respect for Emile, whom he had considered the intrepid master of a worthy craft. "I think I'll go outside and smoke," he said to nobody in particular, in fact so quietly that only the keen ears of the little man behind the bar caught what he was saying.

He twirled the spindling end of his waxed moustache and grinned at Jean. "Gawd, young feller, ye're a giant, ain't ye? Gawd, I'd like to be built like ye! Ain't ye ever t'ought o'trainin' fer the ring?" he asked amiably enough.

"Ring? I don't un'erstan' . . . ring? What is she?"

"Fightin'. Prize-fights, ye know," he explained, sparring in the empty air . . . shadow-fighting.

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"Oh . . . yes . . . me, I un'erstan' . . . but, no."

"Hell, kid, ye don't know yer stren'th! Ye'd ought to get a good manager somewheres. Get to the big city. . . ."

"Ah, yes . . . sometime . . . maybe."

"Cagey, these frogs," commented Louis to himself. "Can't tell 'em nothin'."

"Tobacco? Got any?"

"They's a shop down the road towards Hotel, near the ol' Injun chapel. Keep goin' straight ahead. Ye can't miss it," and he went on mopping up his counter.

"*Merci.*"

"Not at all." Louis knew his manners.

Jean tiptoed out, although that was quite needless, considering the present condition of his father and Emile. The dusk was gathering and he felt ill-at-ease in the strange settlement. He faltered a moment, gazing up the road, then down, then walked on briskly. Dim lights had begun to shine from the windows of a few houses on the street. He passed Mme. Aurore's, then on to a small shop with a high stoop, two doors beyond. At last, here it was! But suddenly he felt shy. Too many men in there, all talking easily. He didn't know what to ask for . . . one could not just say "tobacco", and let it go at that. What brand did Pat smoke? Or Emile? He couldn't remember, so he strolled by as if he had no business in the place, and presently he came to the Indian Chapel. . . . He pushed through the door, almost striking his head against the lintel and he stood there, cap in hand. The flickering candles made the air stuffy. Jean glanced around and went out again.

He wandered down toward the wharf, meagrely lit with two lanterns, and quite deserted. The steamer lay quietly alongside, its lights streaming in bright ribbons over the water. Strains of music . . . a horn, a fiddle and an accordion, came to his ears, mingled with gay laughter, and stirred him strangely. His big feet, encased in their heavy shoes, shuffled about the dock, trying to keep time.

He took his pipe out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth, letting it hang loosely over his lower lip. He sucked at it tentatively and inhaled a jet of cool, sweet air through its emptiness, as he strutted up and down the dock.

The moon, about in its prime, was making its way through the sky, slipping occasionally behind a dark cloud-bank. Beyond the

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clouds the heavens were thickly sown with stars, from the zenith down to the horizon, where black mountains met the silvery-black river. Jean fancied he saw whole armies marching . . . caravans, outlined with phosphorescent light . . . and suddenly a gigantic pig, riding clumsily upon the hunched shoulders of a dwarf, whose crooked legs stumbled beneath the weight. His paddlefeet trailed through the sky like a frog's in water. Jean laughed in spite of himself. He knew how heavy was that hog! The chimera soon disappeared and the moon emerged once more.

Jean ambled over to the lee-side of a storage-shed, preferring to seek shelter in the shadows, in case anybody from the schooner should come by, searching for him. He tripped over a pair of legs stretched in his path and there followed a volley of curses. "Why in hell don't ye look where ye're goin'?" complained the prostrate one, then supporting himself against the side of the shed he crawled to his feet. Jean recognized him as the sailor he had seen at Mme. Aurore's. The fellow groaned and held onto his stomach. "Ah, the foul bagosse! Always makes me as sick's a dawg." He gulped and spat. "Aw . . . so 'tis you . . . the young Hercules, eh? What ye doin', prowlin' around the docks?"

"Waitin'," answered Jean readily.

"Waitin' . . . waitin'?" he inquired aggressively.

"Waitin'."

"Well, ye can't wait around here!" he exclaimed, shoving Jean against the side of the shed.

"No? Who say so?"

"Me. . . ."

"You?" and Jean tapped him smartly under the chin and he sprawled on his back again.

There he lay and groaned hollowly. "Ye're some fightin' laddie, ain't ye? I was only testin' ye out . . . to see if ye'd got any guts. Ye'll do . . . ye'll do," he admitted, patronizingly. "And now, kid, help me up."

Jean reached down nonchalantly and pulled him to his feet.

"No offence at all . . . no harm done," the other reassured him. "Sailin' with us on the ship, kid?"

"Perhaps. . . ."

"They was talkin' about Pete foolin' the old guy with his jail lingo . . . learned it legit'mate, too, Pete did. He's tough!"

"The ship . . . how soon she sail?" Jean asked, staring fearfully up the dark path which led back to town.

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"In about two hours now. Goin'?"

"Sure."

"Thought ye might be gettin' scairt about leavin' the fellers and startin' out on your lonesome. . . . Ain't afraid?"

"Afraid? What's that? I do not know can I get gone so easy . . . with all *them* in Tadousac . . . *mon père*, Emile, Pat and Bill . . . all watching me. Maybe they come here. . . ."

"Naw! Why, they're drunk as lords . . . all four of 'em! Your paw and Emile up to Archie's an' the other two have boozed themselves under the table in that rum-hole down the line. They won't even know the way back. They'll be damn' lucky if they wake up at all to-morrer. Come . . . let's sit down. You understand English some, don't ye?"

"I hear the lumber-jacks. . . ."

"I'll learn ye. Got any clo'es with ye?"

"Back there," and Jean pointed toward the dark shadow of the schooner. "We get 'em?"

"Ye mean go out to that lousy, old win'jammer? I s'pose we could. Got a dinghy?"

"Yes . . . over there."

The sailor peered out through the settling gloom to the place where the schooner lay, small and black, against the electric blue of the sky. "Why, she ain't even got a lantern on her, but the moon's up, so I s'pose we can make it. Well, let's get goin' then. My name's Andrew."

"I am Jean."

"I think I'll call ye Johnny-Hercules."

"Hercules . . . who is he?"

"Oh . . . him? Why, he's a giant in the Bible. . . . Yep, in the Bible, I guess," answered Andrew dubiously. "Sho . . . perhaps I'll just call ye Johnny."

Jean unloosed the ropes that held the dinghy and they climbed in. He dipped his oars and the boat swung away from the dock. Andrew sat in the stern and watched the blades dip and rise, and the showers of silvery drops, luminous in the moonlight. Silently they drew alongside the hull. "Better hurry!" advised Andrew as he stepped into Jean's place and watched the boy clambering on board. He stumbled about aimlessly in the darkness, but finally located a lantern and lighted it. Out on the water Andrew watched the light flitting about above his head like a fire-fly . . . now here . . . now there . . . then out of sight . . . only to reappear again

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in another place. . . . Total darkness on the river, and so still that Andrew could hear his own breathing.

Jean and the lantern came in sight again, and the rays outlined his young figure, as he swung one long leg over the rail, then poised there. He looked about him, as if desirous of imprinting for all time on his memory the homely grace of the old windjammer . . . his first ship which had safely borne him to his second. Ah! He was sorry to leave her! He thought of that first night under the stars, when he had been young and the vessel was new to him . . . and of that other night and the storm roaring down the cañon . . . L'Anse St. Jean and his first pipe! He could feel it in his pocket now. Why, this very morning he had thought impatiently of fishing at Sainte-Marguerite, and here he was now, ready to sail from Tadousac to an unknown port.

"Hey . . . you . . . Johnny, c'mon, before the boat leaves without us."

"I come," murmured Jean, taking one last survey of the schooner from stem to stern. She was dark and gloomy, and smelled a little of old wood and bilge-water and ancient cargoes . . . something indefinable and indecent, he had failed to notice before . . . decay.

"Hang yer lantern aft, Johnny, an' light the light in the binnacle. May help 'em to find the boat if they ever do sober up. C'mon!"

Jean, with his bundle slung over his shoulder, slid down the side of the vessel and into the boat. Andrew kept his place. "I'll row back," he said.

"Ah, no . . . I row! I sit and keep her in sight a little longer. See?" he pleaded.

"Sho," assented the other. "Ye're sure a queer kid."

"Good, ol' windjammer!"

"Good enough as schooners go, but I prefer steam, myself."

Jean watched her disappearing into the night. Once, for an instant, mast and sailyard cut across the livid face of the moon . . . and in another moment a section of her slanting shrouds . . . a phantom ship, which he would remember all the days of his life.

"What's her name?" asked Andrew.

"Towman. . . ."

"Towman?" mumbled Andrew thoughtfully. "Funny name, ain't it, but what's in a name anyhow?"

"It's English for man pulls a barge. . . ."

"Sho, I know. Sho would take a husky guy to pull one of

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them ugly, black slugs, crawling through the canals. I s'pose they got their use though."

"She tow a barge on the great river down there, so Emile change her name."

"The cussed fool! Don't he know it's unlucky to change the name of a boat?"

"Oh . . . Emile? He's grand man . . . grand sailor . . ." boasted Jean.

"That don't make no diff'runce. Change the name of a boat an' luck's against ye, that's all. I wouldn't trust my carcass to that lousy, ol' win'jammer with her name changed! Not me!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE sun rose, resplendent, sending shafts of amber and vermilion through the tawny clouds of the east. Birds and beasts of the night sought solitude in the depths of the forest. On land the clear jangle of cow-bells and the twittering chorus of birds; over water the lonely scream of the gulls, out for their early fishing . . . welcome sounds to Louis' ears. He yawned, rubbed his rheumy eyes, always smarting from lack of sleep; rubbed them until the tear-ducts glowed, inflamed and swollen. Then mechanically he stood up on a chair to blow out the sperm-oil lamps, bracketed to the wall. One had burned dry and the smouldering carbon filled the room with its stench. "Whew!" said Louis. He sniffed. "Hell, musta fell asleep!"

Over in one corner the drunken sailor still dozed, and in another, Emile and Pierre; Emile with his feet on the table amidst glasses and bottles, and Pierre, unobtrusively, as always, sitting upright in his chair, with his arms folded precisely across his narrow chest.

Archambaud entered, smoking a black cigar, "*Bonjour*, Louis."

"Howdy."

"Keepin' lodgers?"

"Ye—ah, looks so, don't it?"

"Know where they come from?"

"Them two come in on the win'jammer yonder."

"Ah-h-h, *oui*! I know. Let 'em be. I been talkin' with Gar from Nova Scotia. We gotta get a boat somehow, and Emile, *he* has one."

"Sure . . . I get ye."

"And *him*, who's he?" Archie asked, jerking his thumb toward the sleeping sailor.

"Oh, him? Some bloke they shanghaied in New Yawk, I'm thinkin'. Said he was a stowaway they put to woik . . . they *said*," he insinuated, and he spat into the nearest spittoon.

"They sail without him?"

"Yeah, two fellers brought 'im here an' stood 'im to a coupla drinks an' went out an' left 'im. Must be he can't hold nothin'

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atall. The minute they let go of him, why, he just caved in. Mebbe he was sick or somethin' . . . rotten heart . . . I do' know. They was holdin' 'im up when they come in."

Archambaud nodded wisely. "Mebbe jinx? . . . What?"

"I do' know."

"*Eh bien*, let him sleep it off, an' when he wakes up José can put him to work. If he's no good . . . we ship him, too," Archie leered and winked.

"Ye bet. . . ."

"Where's José?"

"He'd oughta be here any minute."

"I got business with them two, I think. Where's the kid was with 'em?"

"Do' know. Ain't seen 'im since he left to get some tobaccer last night. Funny! Ye don't s'pose he coulda sailed on *her*?" Louis jerked his head toward Quebec.

Archambaud shrugged his fat shoulders. "Let 'im go. A greeny anyhow."

"But strong's an ox!"

"An' I need strong men," he grumbled regretfully.

"What for, Archie? . . . Ye ain't told me yet," the other remarked.

"Ah, ye're only a dope! What diff'runce that make to you anyhow?"

"Aw . . . well, ye don't have to open up."

"All right, I need a ship . . . bad! I tell ye I need a ship, an' if I need a ship, I need men too, *hein*?"

"Ye . . . ah, ye said that. . . . Well. . . .?"

"Ah . . . José!" Archie's eyes lighted up. "Ah, it's you!"

"*Holá, amigos*," José greeted them, smiling affably. He was as floridly handsome as Louis was unprepossessing. His yellow trousers, neatly creased and cut high at the waist, contrasted jarringly with his pink silk shirt. His hair was heavily greased, and waved lavishly back from his high, dark forehead. His features were almost cameo-like, the nose delicately chiselled, but the pendulant lips and dark skin had made Louis refer more than once to "the nigger." José kept his peace, ingratiatingly, although, in truth, he was no coward, as Louis was forced to admit, for time and again he had seen José hurl a gin-crazed lumber-jack through the swinging doors, without disarranging the cuffs of his silk shirt.

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Archie gazed at him now with admiration in his little eyes. "Come here, José," he invited him. "In here," ushering him into his private cubicle, and closing the door in Louis' face, "Ye see it's like this," he began, lowering his voice. "I gotta get me a boat somewheres. *Voilà* . . . like in answer to my prayer comes this fool schooner from nowheres. Emile . . . I know is a good man, who knows his boat like she was a wife . . . an' Pat an' Bill . . . veterans . . . what you say? Last night, Aurore, she send me word they come here an' they talk with Gar from Nova Scotia. This Gar I know long time . . . this man I send far away . . . to . . . to . . . nev' mind." He breathed heavily and continued, "I send him far away if I get a boat . . .," he added at length.

"To Newfoundland and the Grand Banks . . . if ye get a boat?" José completed the sentence sibilantly . . . caressingly.

"How d'ye know?" roared Archambaud.

"Gar has a big mouth . . . this Gar from Nova Scotia . . . talks big, when he gets drunk down to Victor's place."

"*Sapristi!* . . . He better keep his damn' mouth shut!" threatened Archie darkly.

"Cod . . . whales . . . perhaps seals next spring?" José spoke softly, all the while scrutinizing Archie's face in order to catch the slightest change of expression. "So that's it?"

"Ah, *oui* . . . ! What's the use of hidin' it from you?" Archie responded testily. "But keep yer mouth shut!" he blustered.

"I hear the waters writhe with 'em till October," José continued sagaciously, "an' what Frenchman would fail to try his luck even in a . . . stolen schooner . . . or shall we say, . . . 'borrowed'?"

"Ye old ferrit!" exclaimed Archie, yet not ill-pleased. "Well, José, . . . what you think?"

"Plenty cod there . . . sure . . . an' here comes the ship . . . an' there ye are! But where's the crew? Tell me that! Where's the crew?"

"That's what I was comin' to. Me . . . I get 'em somehow!" boasted Archie, then he lowered his voice to a whisper. "But, no, my friend, *we* get 'em, you an' me," he said, patting José on the shoulder. "You know how . . .?" he chuckled.

"Ah . . . si . . . ! But it takes money. . . ."

Outside the closed door, his ear to the key-hole, Louis nodded to himself "The ol' fox! The low-life pole-cats! They thought they'd get rid o' me, did they? We—ll, they won't so easy," and

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yawning loudly, he turned the knob and entered. "Aw . . . w . . . w, dis crew ye speak of," he drawled . . . "want I should wake 'em up?"

José looked at him sullenly, but said nothing.

"Ye rat, always hidin' behind closed doors!" stormed Archie.

"Sh-h-h-h," warned José. "Eh, Weasel, what's yer price?"

"How much did ye hear?" inquired Archie.

"Plenty . . . an' what I know besides. . . !"

"*Sacré nom de Jésus!* Ye dope! Don't know why I spilled my mouth anyhow! Ye'll get yer five per-cent an' no more, as usual."

"S'pose I ever tell. . . ."

"Five per-cent," snapped José, rising in his chair, and adjusting his cuffs. "Take it or leave it be!"

"Aw . . . I take it. . . ."

José eased himself back into his seat and lit a long cigar.

"Better go out an' stir up them boys . . . Emile an' his friend. Treat 'em right. Give 'em a good breakfast, y' understand, then we'll talk turkey. Louis, stir up that other guy . . . never saw anybody sleep so long."

"Ye ain't goin' to use 'im? I think ye're right . . . he's a jinx, I'll bet . . . else why'd they leave 'im here?"

"José'll fix him."

All three moved swiftly back into the saloon, where Emile and Pierre still slept. Pierre's head had fallen back against the chair. Between them, José and Louis supported his inert body, and laid him on the old couch, with the sagging springs, in the room Archie called his office. Then José marched over to the sailor and grabbed his shoulder. Quickly he let go and bent forward to examine wet spots in the saw-dust, then he blew a jet of smoke precipitately toward the low-beamed ceiling and ejaculated, "Ah, . . . Dios! Dead! Stabbed!"

Archie and Louis hurried to his side. "*Sacré nom de Dieu!*" Archie swore, crossing himself. "The swine! . . . to kill him an' leave him here!"

"Hell! An' to think I stayed here all night with a stiff!" whined Louis.

"Ass, that ye didn't know it before! Now, shut up!" barked José. His eyes narrowed as he pondered over the problem. "Gotta get rid of him some way. Who was here besides them two . . . an' him?"

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"Oh . . . same ol' crowd . . . officers an' crew goin' an' comin' . . . an' the kid. . ."

"What kid?" snapped José.

"Why, the little Frenchy's here."

"Ah . . . so . . .? That's easy. The kid killed him," decided José thoughtfully.

"Aw, no, ye don't neither! Ye ain't goin' to fasten the moider on that kid!"

"Think, man! The kid was here an' he left, didn't he, an' he went off on the boat . . .?"

"How d'ye know?"

"I see ev'rything," answered José with a proud gesture.

"Ye're a smart guy, José! Ye think ye know ev'rythin', don't ye?"

"He killed him and run away. . . ."

"But I didn't see no knife on the kid. . . . Stabbin' looks like your kind o' doity woik . . ." hinted Louis. "Pertendin' like ye didn't know 'e was dead!"

José smiled. "The kid killed him, I say, an' run away. . . ."

"He did not, ye doity liar! He's a good kid. . . . Whyn't ye leave 'im be?" he begged.

"Shut up! Perhaps you killed him yourself?"

"Ye—ah, mebbe . . . I'm a killer, I am! Ye don't pull that trap on me! I'm wise . . . I am!"

"Sure ye didn't kill 'im. 'Cause why? Ye ain't got the guts! That's why! Listen, Louis, you're wise. Yes? Archie's gotta get his crew together, ain't he? Here's a boat an' part of the crew already . . . now if ye'll only be reasonable . . ." and José grabbed his wrist and twisted it ever so delicately.

"All right."

"Maybe the kid didn't do the actual killing . . . no . . . but they will *think* he did . . . an' so they sign up. . . . See?" He emphasized his speech with colorful gestures.

"Aw . . . well-ll," Louis gave in reluctantly. "But he was a good kid an' I ain't goin' to have 'im sent up for somethin' he ain't done, ye un'erstan'?"

"Nobody will be blamed here . . . nobody will know . . . only Emile an' his father. . . . See?"

"Sure," said Archie, relieved. "*Eh, bien*, get rid of it! Get it out of my sight!" he commanded, looking at the dead man.

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"Bury him somewheres an' don't tell me where. Bring bad luck to my place! Dead man's blood an' dead man's bones. . . ."

"Aw, forget it! Ye didn't stay here with 'im all night like I done!" grumbled Louis.

"What ye paid for?" asked José almost too politely.

"Shut-up yer wranglin', an' get him out o' my sight before someone comes!"

"Ye-ah. Grab aholt, José, an' let's we get it over with."

"I'm goin' up," said Archambaud. "José, you watch them two . . . an' see nobody kills 'em! What about Pat an' Bill?"

"Soused, and Victor'll see to it that they're kept so till we want 'em."

"*Eh, bien*, call me when he wakes up," jerking his thumb toward Emile. "I must talk to him," and Archie mounted the stairs to the apartment above.

"Where'll we put the stiff?" asked Louis.

"The river . . . maybe?"

"He might slip 'is moorin's an' come up ag'in. Dead men in water tell tales sometimes, an' I reckon, José, ye don' figger on seein' this here cawpse any more . . . *yerself!*"

"I advise you not to mention that again, my frien'. . . ."

"Shut-up, you two, an' hustle him down cellar! . . . *Vite!* . . . *Vite!* . . . Somebody comes," Archie called to them in a stage-whisper. "An' to-night . . . to-night bury him . . . behind the barn. . . ." He wiped the sweat from his brow and adjusted his waistcoat over his bulging abdomen.

CHAPTER IX

SHORTLY before noon a beam of light struck Emile full in the face. He sneezed and woke up. "W'iskey," he called thickly, swinging his feet to the floor. "Damn! My legs is asleep," and complaining, he rubbed them vigorously. He blinked and stared about him. "W'iskey!" he repeated to José, who stood coolly polishing glasses behind the bar.

José breathed upon his glass and rubbed it briskly before deigning to answer, "Ah, my frien', you don't want whiskey. You want black coffee."

"And Pierre . . . where's he? Pierre!" he bawled.

"Asleep . . . in there."

"I'll wake him up. Time to start." Emile got to his feet, swaying unsteadily. Then he sat down suddenly. "Hell! The w'iskey Louis give us was rat-poison . . . ha?"

"Ah, no, my frien'. . . . You drink too much, perhaps. Par-don," José begged, flashing his artificial smile.

"But Pierre. . . .?"

"An' Pierre drink too much . . . too."

"Ah, *hélas!* An' Pat an' Bill both drunk, I s'pose?"

"So I fear . . . down at Victor's."

"Jean-Ba? Where's Jean-Ba? Where's that boy?"

"Oh, you mean the kid?" José stalled.

"Ye know who I mean! Where's he at?"

"Ah, my frien', I am sorry, but he has disappeared . . . on the ship, when she sailed a little after midnight. I hate to tell you, but your young frien' thought it best to depart after . . . after . . . well, what happened last night. I better call Archie. He'll tell you." And José walked without haste to the foot of the stairs and called up, "Simone . . . Simone, bring coffee . . . an' call Archie. The Señor is awake."

Emile grabbed at him and shook his fist malevolently at José's quite conscious back. "The black devil! Why did I come to this hole? *Sapristi!* Now I *am* in a pickle!"

"Hey, you there, nigger, call Pierre!" he ordered peremptorily.

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José drew himself erect at the insult, then thought better of it. "The poor man is asleep . . ." he objected suavely.

"Call him, damn ye! An' if anything has happened to him, I'll get ye an' get ye plenty!"

"As you please," commented José.

"An' send somebody after them two ol' fools. . . ."

"I have nobody to send," José shrugged his shoulders.

"*Alors*, find somebody then! Find somebody!"

Emile glanced up as he heard the tripping steps of Simone on the stairs. She bore on her tray a crusty hunk of bread and a cup of steaming coffee. She rolled her black eyes at him and smiled coyly, but he, usually so susceptible, greeted her smiles with a scowl. Then fat Archambaud hove into sight, the stairs creaking beneath his weight.

"Ah . . . my friend . . ." he greeted Emile unctuously, but his words died still-born, for José had mounted the lower steps, deliberately checking his advance. There they held a whispered conversation within range of the glowering scrutiny of Emile. Finally Archie nodded, brushed his bulk past José and descended. "Go away," he waved Simone aside. She pouted prettily and left, but whirled about on her heels as she passed José, to caress his pink-clad shoulder.

"So José has told you about Jean?" Archie began in French.

"I don't believe a word of it!" Emile blustered. "When did it happen . . . if it's true, as you say?"

José hovered near.

"After you had imbibed freely . . . and . . . well, let us say . . . gone to rest," Archie smiled benignly. "The sailor, who sat over there . . . he and Jean had words. Louis, the night-man, tried to stop them, knowing the sailor for a rogue, mean and murderous. Jean knifed him. . . . Louis was helpless."

"Whose knife?" catechized Emile.

Archie blinked and hesitated the briefest fraction of a moment, his mouth gaping.

"Whose knife?" Emile repeated in English.

"Ah, Señor, his own, I fear," José put in hastily. "He must have taken it with him when he left. It is not here."

Archie shut his mouth like a trap. The day was saved! "Sure . . . the same like all woodsmen use," he embellished the lie.

"Self-defense . . . it must have been," ruminated Emile aloud.

"Say, you, dark-face, I thought I told ye to call Pierre."

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The color rose in José's face. "At your command," he agreed with frigid politeness.

"Self-defense, you say? But who would believe it?" Archie shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, and shook his head. "Louis saw the sailor strike no blow."

"Queer . . . Jean-Ba did that. . . . Strike him with his fist? . . . Yes. But the knife? . . . Never! . . . Never!" he repeated, but less certainly. He grabbed the cup and gulped down the coffee, wishing, by all the gods, that he could clear his befuddled brain. He couldn't think, and what was he to tell Pierre, who entered at this point, supported with mock solicitude by José.

Pierre glared at Emile resentfully. "Now, see what you have done! *Dieu*, I die! Best whiskey in Canada! . . . swill! . . . and poison at that."

"Hush! Sit down!" said Emile. "Listen to me carefully. Jean-Ba has sailed on the boat . . . gone to Quebec . . . Montreal . . . anywhere, for all we know. These men, here, say he killed a man and ran away . . . the sailor who sat over there . . . drunk. Remember?"

"My boy . . . killed him? Oh, no! . . . no!" shrieked Pierre, entirely unnerved.

"Quiet, Pierre . . . and let us think. We must think," he declared tensely.

"But how? . . . why?"

"God knows! A quarrel, they say . . . and Jean knifed him. Pierre, set your wits to working! Did he carry a knife? Think! If not, it might have been the other fellow's. . . . Think! It would then be self-defense. . . ."

"He had a knife . . . one I got him last year in Robervál," Pierre answered slowly.

"Ah . . . yes," moaned Emile. "The devil take me if I ever drink myself drunk again!"

"Too late . . . too late," sobbed Pierre.

"Here, drink this, Señor," José urged him, offering him coffee.

Pierre waved him aside and buried his face in his hands. What to tell his mother? . . . What to tell Marie-Blanche . . . ?

"Where's the body?" demanded Emile sullenly. "Where it is . . . if there is one?"

"Show 'em, José," directed Archie.

"This way."

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"Emile, I can't go! . . . I don't want to see . . . it! . . . I won't . . . I can't!" begged Pierre.

"Stay here. I go," said Emile, patting his shoulder.

Pierre remained slumped in his chair, staring blindly at the steaming coffee.

"Drink it," suggested Archie. "Best thing for a man in your condition."

Pierre lifted the cup to his trembling lips and drank.

At length the others returned, Emile obviously less sure of his ground. He felt he couldn't bluff this through . . . he must try some way out. If only he had Pat and Bill with him, they might rush the place . . . but then there'd still be Archie and the Spaniard and the Rat, left behind to squeal.

Pierre grabbed his hand and held on feverishly. "Was it . . . was he there?" he asked with difficulty.

"Yes . . . dead . . . stabbed through the heart . . . clean through . . . twice."

"Ah . . . *le malheureux*! Oh, why did I ever leave the lake with Jean-Ba? But . . . maybe . . . Joseph! But, yes, Emile, there's Joseph! Perhaps he can help?"

"Ah . . . Joseph!"

"Joseph, an' who is he?" questioned José quickly.

"His brother, the Jesuit, who stays at Pointe-aux-Alouettes this summer."

"Ah . . . a padre?" He shrugged his shoulders. "What can he do . . . but keep your secret?"

"Secret?" eagerly Emile caught up his words. "Ye mean . . . then . . . ye ain't goin' to tell?"

"You think I will tell, my friend? But why? We are all brothers . . . we guard your secret." Archie was grieved. Then quickly in his own tongue, "He is gone and you take my advice and get out also, for awhile. I have a scheme . . .," pretending to think, "Wait. . . . The maps, José . . . the maps . . .!" He clapped his fat hands.

"Here."

"Draw close . . . listen," then reverting to English again, lest Pierre should understand too much, he outlined his plan. "See . . . this little voyage. . . ." His stubby forefinger with its black nail traced the route to the mouth of the St. Lawrence, through the Gulf and around the southern coast of Newfoundland to the Grand Banks. He paused here significantly. "Cod," he said

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briefly, then his finger skirted the coast north to the Strait of Belle Isle, pausing again at the nose of Labrador. "Cod . . . an' mebbe skins . . . seals," then down the West Coast, where the French held exclusive fishing rights.

Emile grunted. He was catching on, but preferred to have Archie show his hand. Pierre was all at sea.

.. "*Voilà!* What you think?

"Take my smack up there? Ye're crazy!" Emile waved his arms in dramatic refusal. "Too far . . . fogs . . . bad weather . . . bergs . . . storms. . . . NO!"

"Not too far, an' nobody knows the fishin'-grounds better 'n you."

"The schooner, she's too small . . . an' old. What ye want me to go there to the frozen north for? Mebbe more dead sailors? It'd be murder . . . death for me an' my men . . . an' if we don't ram somethin' in the fog, we freeze to death! *Sacré nom de Dieu!*"

"Gold," sighed Archie, licking his lips.

Emile's jaw dropped. "Gold? . . . A rush. . . .?"

"*L'argent* . . . money!" reiterated José, flashing his artificial smile.

"Gold? There?"

"Yes, in fish . . . cod . . . thousands of them . . . tens of thousands . . ." elaborated José. "An' perhaps whales an' seals."

"Ain't no season for seals! Besides she'd crumple up like a pasteboard box in the ice. Couldn't trust her in them waters. She's an old tub I pick up cheap. I caulk her and paint her up. . . . She looks good, sure, but . . . no! No!" he said slowly and yet his eyes glistened with greed. In spite of his doubts, the idea attracted him. "I have no crew to man the boat for the open sea . . . an' no quarters for the men."

"Oh . . . that? We'll fix that! Here you are, her skipper . . . an' with Gar for mate . . . and a better pilot never sailed a ship to the Grand Banks. . . ."

"Pat, he's always been my mate an' will be 's long's I live!" Emile vociferated.

"No matter . . . Pat or Gar . . . Let 'm fight it out, an' the best man wins," agreed Archie cheerfully. "Then there's Sandy McNam, the sealer, . . . an' with Bill for cook an' Pierre here. . . ."

"Seals? Cod's what ye said!"

"Sure . . . well, maybe seals next spring . . . perhaps."

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"There ain't goin' to be no next spring! Foolhardy! No place for the crew . . . besides . . . Pat an' Bill an' Gar don't make up a crew . . . an' Pierre ain't a sea-farin' man. . . ."

"Ah . . . José has men in mind, eh? Let 'em sleep anywheres. They'll be furs an' blankets enough."

"Ah . . . yes."

"Not me!" denied Pierre, after suspicion had filtered through his aching brain. "I go back to my farm."

"You . . . my frien' . . . I advise you to lay low for a time . . .," José warned him.

"Emile, I do not understand this man," pleaded Pierre.

"He means you must go, Pierre, and I guess you better . . . to save the boy."

"But . . . for how long?"

"Two . . . three months, with good luck. Be back sure by November," Archie promised vaguely.

"We'll need the luck," said Emily wryly. "Who's furnishin' outfit?"

"We tend to that . . . an' give ye twenty-five per-cent."

"*Ciel!* Fifty-fifty . . . or no go!"

"*Sapristi!*" Archie appealed to José. "Here I furnish a plan of escape . . . money . . . supplies . . . all, an' you furnish one rotten, old boat an' four men. . . ."

"I'm takin' all the risk, ain't I? . . . an' don't I have to pay my men?"

"You . . . you demand more . . . you with a murderer to hide?" José reminded him.

"*Alors,*" consented Emile. "But thirty-five per-cent . . . or no go!"

"Done," acquiesced Archie readily. "When you start? Tomorrow?"

"Gawd, man! Impossible!"

"Sooner the better . . . before they find out the kid run away. José an' me, we get ev'rything ready . . . supplies . . . men. What more ye want?"

"Where's Pat an' Bill?"

"Ah, *them?* . . . They will come pronto . . . when we want 'em," promised José suavely.

Emile glared at him. "I'm thinkin' ye've shanghaied me 'n my ship, but remember, if this trip is crooked . . . if this is a pirates' game an' ye're settin' that Gar up to any of his filthy, poachin'

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tricks, I'll get ye for it, if it takes me to my dyin' day! Ye think ye got me now where ye want me, but watch out! Give me a w'iskey! Get your men, but mind ye, Pat's my mate an' not that brute from Nova Scotia! I'll see to it he's second mate an' Gawd knows that's a dawg's life!" he declared savagely.

José shrugged his shoulders and smiled sardonically. He exchanged glances with Archie. It had been far easier than they had dared hope. Nonchalantly the Spaniard extracted a small box from his pocket and carefully selected therefrom two white tablets. "Simone," he called. "Simone! Simone . . . ah . . . give these to that little gutter-rat, Louis, with my regards . . . for his head-ache."

"An' perhaps . . . one more little pilule . . . to keep his mouth shut tight," guffawed Archie. "Simone . . . vite . . .!"

"Three would kill a man," whispered José.

"Ah, an' we bury our dead, don't we?" queried Archie, winking broadly.

CHAPTER X

LIKE a bird of ill omen, the ancient squaw loitered near the wharf, her basket of moccasins beside her. Sometimes she stood behind a post, again she crouched in the shadow of lumber, piled ready for shipment. Always she watched to see her prophecy fulfilled. She was not surprised when Emile's boat pulled alongside and docked, and all day long men swarmed over her, overhauling the rigging, greasing and tarring. Others came and went, an endless procession, trundling hand-trucks, laden with food, blankets, bearskin coats and woolens. Her eyes narrowed. So they were bound for the north-country, where winter falls early? Ah . . . so? There were Emile, Pat, Pierre and Bill, who had come from the lake country only two days ago, now caught in the toils of the spider . . . and there was the bad man from Nova Scotia . . . and Sandy McNam. Sandy McNam? Seals? she wondered. She knew most of them for men, good and bad. Five or six she could not recognize . . . flotsam and jetsam thrown by the river, she judged shrewdly.

All day long Emile shouted directions hoarsely; Pat cursed broadly, as he lurched about; little Bill nagged in his whining falsetto. But silently Pierre scurried back and forth, accomplishing nothing, always in the way, always jostled . . . a man lost. And, lolling against a bollard, his hands in his pockets, was the oily Spaniard, smoking his long, black cigar, and flashing his gleaming teeth. "The evil spirit take him!" muttered the Indian.

Dusk fell and Emile stopped his shouting, wiped his streaming brow and joined José, and the two sauntered back to town, deeply engrossed in a discussion.

That night the Towman weighed anchor and got under way under full sail. Only Archambaud and José were there to watch her as she paid off the wind and sailed directly before it into the blackness of the sky and water . . . only they and the old woman who lurked behind the kegs and the lumber, in the drizzling rain. Archie rubbed his fat hands together and smiled suavely. José smoked. Their fondest hopes realized, they turned their steps

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slowly back to the saloon. It would be time to rouse Louis and get him on his feet again, if they didn't want another corpse on their hands.

Pierre stood by the rail and watched the others clamber below, or go forward about their business. He stood there, straining his eyes, holding the vision of the lights twinkling along the shore, as long as possible, before he crept to the poop-deck. Gazing down into the dark unknown from this dizzy height, he became suddenly sick at heart. A gnawing fear struck him at the very pit of his stomach. Black, horrible water . . . distance, fathomless, yawning between him and home! Already he fancied he could hear the wind shrilling over the ice of the north, and the terrible, untamed sea pounding the ancient vessel, dragging her down to her ruin. "God, stop them!" he sobbed.

They couldn't make him stick it out! His whole being cried out against this new peril. He would jump! He would swim ashore! Any lake man could swim that far. . . .

He stumbled down to the main deck, and somehow, his knees trembling beneath him, to the larboard side. The dark void lay below him, still yawning. He recoiled . . . but he knew that he must delay no longer, if ever he hoped to gain the shore. His quivering lips formed the words . . . "Mary . . . Mother . . . good Saint Christophe . . . Jean-Baptiste, my forbear . . . save me . . . save me!" Then he jumped.

His body struck the water with a resounding thud, which nearly knocked the wind out of him, and was plainly heard forward. "Man overboard . . . man overboard! All hands aho-oy!" reëchoed from stem to stern. "Where? Where?" "Who is it?" "Damme, if I know!" "Where . . .?" "To larboard . . . yonder. . . ." Pierre heard their cries, as he struck out madly for the shore, away off there in the gloom. He was tired . . . already tired, this lake man who had boasted that he could swim. He wished he had not attempted it. . . . He would die! . . . Then close-to, he heard another thud and water showered about his head . . . then a welcome voice, "Where're ye at? Speak up, man . . . 't is dark." Pat!

"Here," Pierre choked weakly and gave up trying.

A hand shot out of the darkness and grabbed his shoulder, then guided him skilfully, while they swam the few feet which lay between them and the schooner. Other hands reached down and helped them up, and a lantern cast its sickly glow over the anxious

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faces above. Safely on board once more, Pierre faced Pat who had rescued him . . . who had unwittingly spoiled his plans, whatever they were, for at this point Pierre couldn't remember. Oh, yes, he had wanted to save himself, but he was too frail. Everything was set against him. . . .

Rescuer and rescued, the men breathed heavily, and pools of water formed at their feet. Pat gulped and spat. "Hell!" he drawled. "Ye damn' spalpeen . . . so 't was you fallin' overboard?"

"I . . . I . . . oh, what's the use? I go . . . below," faltered Pierre.

"Let 'im be, Pat! He's 'ad a 'ard d'y of it," urged Bill.

"*Sapristi!* Damn' hard, I say!" Emile agreed. "Go below an' change yer duds, Mr. Mate. Gar, he's standin' first watch; Adolph, the middle; an' Gregoire, the mornin'."

Pat nodded and followed Pierre below. There he found him, seated dejectedly on the edge of his bunk. "Get up an' get out o' them wet things, an' don't yer try it again. Man, ye can't get away with it, nohow. Ye'd never make shore on a dark night like this . . . an' what if ye did? They'd get ye again . . . sure . . . them two. Stick by us an' we'll see it t'rough together. Mebbe 't is a frame-up, like we think, but we can't be sure an' we can't prove nothin', so we gotta make the best of it, ain't we? Anyhow the kid's safe. . . ."

"Who knows?"

"Sure he is!" Pat slapped Pierre on the shoulder. "An' I bin thinkin' mebbe somebody'll tell the good priest, an' mebbe he'll do something . . . mebbe. . . ."

"Perhaps," Pierre sighed, as he drew off his sodden garments. "But perhaps we never return to find out. . . ."

"Sure we will . . . if only the ol' tub holds together long enough."

That night the schooner sailed out into oblivion, and in the days to come sailors told strange tales of a derelict windjammer, sailing north of the Strait of Belle Isle, battered fiercely by the waves, but gallantly navigating the mountainous waters. She sailed on through fog, through foul weather and fair, ever stout of heart. Sometimes she disappeared when the curious approached her; sometimes she led them on like a mad will-o'-the-wisp. Perhaps she was only a mirage, but seasoned mariners spoke of the Towman with bated breath, and declared it only went to prove that you must never change the name of a ship! It brought bad luck.

CHAPTER XI

THE steamer made her way smoothly up the Champlain toward Whitehall. She skirted islands, nestling like gems against the shimmering surface of the green water, flowing between wooded banks. The lake resembled a great river, meandering its snaky length from Whitehall to the Richelieu. So early in the morning nobody was about, save Jean, and the deck-hands, swabbing down. The ship would dock to-day and be delivered over to the Transportation Company, who would put her to use immediately, towing barges and canal-boats. Since the coming of the railroad had killed through passenger-boats, Whitehall was not the important center it used to be, Andrew told Jean. The tales he could tell of the old Whitehall in the late forties! And of the Irish emigrés and "ship-fever!"

To-day Jean would collect his wages along with the rest of the temporary crew, and then he would be free . . . and without a job, but that worried him little. He was strong, with a strength at which young and old marvelled, and he would find something to do! Perhaps he and Andrew would bum it for a while. Jean wasn't worrying about his future, as he turned his face toward the fresh coolness of the dawn, which made him forget the blistering heat of yesterday.

He stood by the rail and watched a pair of loons, winging toward the denseness of the forest. Then a bittern broke away from the wall of green, and diving gracefully, waded in the shallow waters of the inlet. The lonely cry of the loon came, muted by distance, to his ears . . . reëchoed from across the lake. Always the water, the sky, the forest and bird-shadows. On the Saguenay there had been the eagle; on the St. Lawrence the gulls, gray, white and black, screaming, swooping, retrieving; here the king-fisher, the loon and wild-duck. To starboard he saw two men fishing from a row-boat, and beyond, smoke spiralling lazily from a camp-fire.

Close beside him he heard a sigh, ending in a discreet cough, and he turned abruptly to face the lady with the exotically beau-

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tiful name . . . Diadama . . . the syllables always a song in his heart. He looked at her blankly, at a loss for words, waiting for her to take the initiative, for he had come to learn that she was a lady-passenger, and he but a cabin-boy. He stood facing her and tugged in vain at the out-grown sleeves of his jacket, which stuck to his broad shoulders and hung limply about his waist, and by no stretch of imagination, could be made to cover his great torso. He had fallen into the hurt man's position, and, as well as he could, into his clothes.

"Good morning," Diadama sighed, gazing soulfully into his eyes.

Jean was surprised to see a tear, crystal clear, coursing down her cheek and drop upon the stiffly ruffled bosom of her gown. She was wearing gray to-day . . . a demure, little frock of dove-gray, which seemed to Jean the exact shade of the sky before dawn; gray, but more luminous, as if a light were shining from somewhere within. She wore no hat and the morning light shone brightly upon her brass-colored hair. He longed to touch it, for he had never seen its like before.

"I do believe you've lost your tongue. Can't you say, 'good-morning'?"

"Mornin', ma'am."

She smiled and the dimple sparkled in her left cheek. Why, the great dunce was afraid of her! "So . . . we land to-day," she said, coming closer to him. "Ah, me . . . the trip is over. . . . Where are you goin'? What are you goin' to do now?"

"Me? I dunno."

"I've wanted to speak to you . . . to ask you if perhaps you could help me. See? He's jealous of me . . . see? Doesn't like to see me with other men," she hesitated and threw Jean an imploring glance. "I'm afraid he'll see me talkin' to you. Well, this is the end, lad. He threatens to leave me at Whitehall." Her voice caught in a sob, which tore his heart. His arms ached to fold her close to his chest. "We had some words . . . about . . . well, never mind. He says he is through. Jenny, she'll go through to Saratoga, I expect, with Robert, but Cyril's leavin' me . . . after all his promises, too. Oh, I never should have listened . . . I . . ."

"Your man, he is?"

Perhaps the lad was not such a fool after all? "Well, yes," she admitted sadly. "I s'pose that's what he *was*," and gazed up

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at Jean again, her violet eyes misty with self-pity, which he mistook for innocence.

"Go' damn!" he swore softly. "Excuse, lady, *mais* . . . such a man! *Dieu!* I'll lam 'im one, I will!" And he clenched his fists, frowning savagely.

"Oh, no, laddie," she cooed. "You mustn't do that! No . . . I'll go away . . . somewheres an' try to forget." She put her violet-scented handkerchief to her eyes.

Jean was quite overcome with emotion. "You love 'im?" he blurted out.

"I thought I did . . . more than life itself. I guess I was fooled easy . . . me . . . young an' alone in the great city . . . I . . .," she sighed.

"Fer Gaw's sake, Dinah, what're ye doin' up here at this time o' day? Ah-ha, the early bird after the worm . . . an' a big one, too!"

"Hush yer month, will ye?" Diadama snapped, then recovering herself, "Why, er . . . hello, Jenny. It was so beautiful I just had to get out. Besides . . . Cyril. . . ."

"Ye . . . ah, I heard 'im givin' ye the bounce. Well, ain't I always told ye to take what ye can get while the gettin's good, an' be thankful? Ain't I? Say, tell that greeny to move on out o' range, will ye?" Jenny turned on Jean. "Ye—ah, as I says, when ye get too ambitious an' set yer cap fer a weddin'-ring, why then it's diff'runt. Hey, get goin', will ye? Tell 'em I'll have my coffee served up here."

As the boy moved off, he heard Jenny remonstrating further, "Ye must be crazy to fool 'round that green-horn! Cyril'll give ye the go-by 'fore ye're ready, he will, then where'll ye be?"

"Shut-up, will ye?" cried Diadama. "I guess I got my plans. He needn't think he can drop me just because his ma an' pa're comin' to Saratoga an' bringin' that swell female with 'em. They're afraid I'll up an' marry him, an' I'm goin' to give 'em somethin' to worry about. This kid fits in with my plans, that's all. He might help me out if I get into a squeeze."

"Ye better work careful. If that guy busts Cyril one on the jaw, he'll kill 'im sure, an' then ye'll have a nice mess on yer hands! You watch out, I tell ye!"

"I guess I know what I'm doin'."

Jean made his way to the galley for the captain's mess. He arranged it clumsily on the tray, for he had never learned to be

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skilful nor quick about this service. The officer nodded casually, as Jean righted the salt he had upset. "Know where to get your pay?"

"Sure . . . Andy told me, sir."

"Maybe you'll run into us again sometime. Like to keep ye on, but you know how 'tis. Going to look for a job in Whitehall?"

"Mebbe . . . mebbe the canal, sir."

"I'll bet ye'll head for the city. Most of 'em do."

"Mebbe . . . sir."

Jean was kept busy until the Quaker Lady, regal in her splendid newness, was already rounding the Elbow, a mile north of the town. On the dock were crowds, jostling and pushing each other in the attempt to get as near as possible to the steamer. Some of the people had legitimate business there, but most of them had nothing more important to do than greet the incoming boat and satisfy their natural curiosity about her passengers. Bus-drivers called out the names of rival hotels in raucous, up-state voices. On a siding the engine puffed, ready to transport patrons through the Church street tunnel and on down to Saratoga and Albany. Jean had never seen one at close range before, and he stared avidly. It would be grand to run one of those noisy contraptions! Maybe they were finer than steam-boats?

"Hey, get busy an' give us a lift with this luggage!" he was ordered.

"Come on an' stop dreamin'," advised Andrew, and Jean joined the crew and dock-hands, lifting, hauling, stacking, sweating. In time it was all over and the wharf lay almost deserted in the summer sun. Over at one end, surrounded by a stack of baggage were Diadama and the man she called Cyril. They were arguing. . . . Cyril in subdued tones; Diadama wildly and with eloquent gestures. Jean started toward them.

"Hey, kid, come on! We gotta get our pay," urged Andrew. "They won't waste no time, ye bet."

Paid off and with their scanty luggage slung over their shoulders, the comrades swung down the plank and out into the new world. How good it was to stretch their legs again! Jean looked across the harbor toward the buildings of frame and brick, and laughed aloud. Then he caught sight of the two passengers, Diadama and Cyril, still standing in the midst of their bags and quarreling, now vociferously. Cyril's strident voice showed that

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he had lost his self-possession. "See here! You've got all you're goin' to get out of me!"

"You dare say that to me . . . ME . . . YOU!" Diadama shrilled.

"You've been paid well. . . . And now I'll ask you to step out of my way so I can catch that train to Saratoga."

"I'll follow you if you do! I s'pose ye mean step aside so's ye can marry that swell dame your folks have picked out? Well, I won't! See!"

"Leave her out of this, please," he commanded tensely.

"Treating me like this after all you said . . . after all those promises you made me . . .!"

"I've never promised you anything, and you know it! I guess I was smart enough for that!"

"I'll tell her, I will!"

"Empty threats! Let me warn you that if you ever show up to bother her or anybody else, I'll take legal measures. . . ." Cyril looked at her sternly. He was regaining his poise. She was getting old, he thought. Why had he been so taken in? Damned young ass, just as his father had said. "I'm through!"

At that, Diadama's plump, white hand flew up and hit him smartly on the cheek; then catching sight of Jean, she screamed shrilly and fainted.

Jean, quite bewildered, misinterpreted the drama. Cyril must have struck Diadama, his violet lady, he concluded. With a savage howl, and before the astonished Andrew could restrain him, he covered the rod or two separating him from the contestants, and with one well-directed blow knocked Cyril off his feet.

"Hey, you, Johnny, lay off him! What in Gawd's name are ye doin'? D'ye want to end up in jail?"

"*Mais* . . . he struck her!" Jean bellowed.

"He did not! She slapped his face, the alley-cat. An' now see here . . . ye're gettin' out of this, an' damn' quick, 'fore somebody comes!"

But Jean was bending over Diadama's prostrate body, tenderly rubbing her hands. Her eye-lids flickered and opened heavily as if a great burden weighed them down.

"Johnny, c'mon, I tell ye! She struck him. . . . I seen her! Why, she ain't no lady. . . . She's . . . well, she's . . . not what ye think she is," Andrew finished lamely.

At this Diadama opened her eyes wide and glared up at him,

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then leaning against Jean, she sat up. She rested her head tiredly against his shoulder and Jean was almost intoxicated with the perfume . . . like the lilac blossoms that grew on the old bush beside the steps at home. Then she turned her tragic gaze upon him and cried in dulcet tones, "Oh, laddie, he loves another. After all his promises, he refuses to marry me. . . ."

Jean looked deep into her eyes and felt himself sinking. "I . . . *moi* . . . I marry you!" he whispered ardently.

"Damn ye! Ye will not!" shouted Andrew, his red beard sticking out belligerently. "An' now look-it! See who's comin' . . . the sheriff! C'mon with me!" Andrew grabbed Jean's arm and held on. "Ye better faint again, sister . . . an' when ye wake up, *you* do the explainin'. This here fracas ain't Johnny's business. John, if I have to bust yer fool head in, ye're comin' with me! See, it's all right . . . she's fainted again. . . . She knows the ropes. It ain't the first time she's dickered with the police. I recall this ol' guy, the sheriff, too, . . . hard as nails an' without a spark of imagination."

Jean hesitated the fraction of a second. He even considered picking up his lady and dashing off with her, but Andrew held on and pulled him behind a nearby coal-shed. "See here, ye listen to me an' come away! They won't do nothin' to her . . . an' mebbe . . . *mebbe*, I'm sayin', they'll make him marry her. . . . See?" Andrew was patting himself on the back for a quick thinker.

"*Mais* . . . I stay an' help her. I tell 'em. . . ."

"You tell 'em!" Andrew snorted scornfully. "You . . . with your command of the English languidge! Ye're comin' with me or I'll baste ye one on the snout. Ye see what I done to that fresh bloke on the boat? Well . . .?" He kept a firm hold on Jean while he peeked around the side of the shed. "Don't ye worry. She's back there now on her knees, weepin' over the *reemains* . . . prob'ly tellin' the sheriff how ye hit him without no prov'cation. C'mon Johnny, we're goin' this way an' they're goin' that . . . an' when he wakes up they'll like as not be as lovin' as ever. If he ever tells what ye done an' they ketch ye, though, ye'll be in for life . . . an' think of yer poor ma back home grievin' . . ." Andrew shook his head mournfully.

"*Eh, bien* . . . but," sighed Jean. "*Eh, bien*, I come. . . ."

Andrew guided his steps this way and that, a zig-zag route, hard to trace . . . a technique known to tramps and such, always avoiding scrutiny . . . ever behind a shelter of some sort, deserted and

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ramshackle; and obediently Jean followed. They threaded their way through the narrow aisles between piles of lumber. More than once water gleamed darkly through the crevices at their feet. The damp wood-smell assailed Jean's nostrils, acrid and sweet at the same time, recalling poignantly the lake-country and its industry. Maybe this was St. John timber? A wave of homesickness struck with a sickening thud at the pit of his stomach.

Andrew stopped suddenly to listen, and Jean forged ahead, treading on his feet. "Hell," groaned Andrew. "Just soon be stepped on by a Texas steer! Don't hear nobody follerin', so I guess we might's well stop. Ouch! . . . Gawd!" he grunted, slumping down with his back to a pile of lumber. "Can't keep this pace up forever . . . ain't so young's I was. Say, Johnny, ye ain't never goin' to get along in life if ye're goin' to slug ev'ry bloke as comes along. I'm tuckered out." He snatched off his cap and mopped his brow with a blue calico handkerchief.

"But . . . I no understand . . . she scream. . . ."

"Sure, she yelled. She wanted to attract yer attention, didn't she? Take my advice an' leave females be. Ye'll never be happy chasin' 'em," Andrew scolded him complacently. "We'll set right here an' rest for a while till it begins to get dark, then we'll amble down to the line-barn an' see what's doin'. Keep two—three hun'ed mules there for towin' the barges. Mebbe we'll sign up for a trip. . . . I'll see. . . ."

"Sure," agreed Jean, letting himself down easily and shifting his position until he could peer around the mountain of lumber. There was no sign of life hereabouts. Over there was East Bay, and nearer at hand a stagnant pool of back-water covered with viridescent slime. Bull-frogs croaked in its murky depths, and red-wings chattered noisily among the cat-tails. Mosquitoes swarmed in clouds, humming a musical defiance. Andrew swore under his breath and slapped at them viciously.

"*Les maringouins*," said Jean, as if he were meeting an old friend.

"Muskeeters," corrected Andrew. "Ye're in America now an' ye gotta learn to talk American, so's they can understand ye. Muskeeters . . . damn 'em . . . an' big as horses!"

Jean swatted his wrist, then sat gazing at the lump swelling beneath the dead gnat. He thought of *la boucone* and the old iron pot his mother had tucked away under the thwart of the dory, and which he had hidden, lest his father discover it and insist

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that they load it into the schooner. A whole life-time of events had happened since then. He wondered idly how they were faring at Sainte-Marguerite and if their catch was large. Soon his father would have to think about turning homeward toward the lake again. There had been but few moments of regret for the step he had taken . . . perhaps occasional twinges of conscience, which he quelled as foibles of extreme youth and therefore quite beneath a grown man's dignity. Yet petty reminders like *la boucone* came to his attention every day . . . yesterday the boiled salmon . . . to-day the huckleberry-pie . . . and the salty profanity that was Andrew's and Pat's, too, . . . just little things . . . little ways, for he had seen more than enough to compensate for his loss.

"Smokin' might help," ventured Andrew thoughtfully. A sting on his leathery cheek had closed one eye and given him a ludicrous leer.

"Sure," concurred Jean, always welcoming the opportunity to refill his beloved pipe and light up.

So they sat waiting for evening to fall.

CHAPTER XII

ANDREW was sleeping soundly, his head pillowed on his coat, and Jean felt that there could be no harm in stretching his legs a bit, so he got up cautiously and tiptoed down the aisle between the piles of planks. In places, where a board jutted out beyond its fellows, the passage was so narrow that he squeezed through with difficulty and emerged on the lake-side. Below the Elbow, in the wake of a black tug, a line of barges curved, like a disjointed serpent, bending its body with the bend in the lake . . . clumsy things, stacked with lumber.

On one, a line had been strung from a pole to the cabin-roof, and clean clothes flapped in the breeze . . . brown and gray and blue . . . and at one end a child's pink calico dress. Jean watched the patches of color almost hungrily. They reminded him of 'tite Marie at home and always longing to be somewhere else, as he had yearned heretofore. He paused, deep in tranquil reminiscence, leaning lazily against the timber, until the barges had passed on toward the Basin. Somebody waved and Jean responded wistfully.

At the pier the Quaker Lady was resting after her maiden voyage. Down the lake all was serene and still and empty of life, now that the chain of barges had passed.

Jean kicked aside some splinters, then turned and retraced his steps. Andrew still slept! He was hungry and thirsty . . . now that he came to think of it, he realized he had been hungry and thirsty ever since they left the boat, hours ago. Here was cash in his pockets and more inside his shirt. He wanted to buy food and drink and maybe a new shirt or two, and he wanted to see the sights. He glanced at the sky. The sun was already beginning its downward course, sinking inch by inch, as he watched, toward the horizon, and long shadows met each other across the water.

They wouldn't be able to see anything in town, if they slept all day, and how did Andrew expect to get a job, if they didn't get on down to the canal or to the line-barn? Wasting his time, squatting by a pile of lumber, sleeping or swatting *les maringouins*! *Mon Dieu!* Jean had half a mind to go by himself, but soon

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thought better of it. He bent forward and shook his companion none too gently. "Come . . . get up, Andy!"

"What?" growled Andrew, squinting up at him. "Oh, 't is only you. What's eatin' ye? 'T ain't dark yet," he reminded Jean, yawning.

"C'mon . . . we go," importuned Jean.

"Mebbe they'll be on the lookout fer ye."

"We go. I take care o' myself."

"Well, I expect we might's well be on our way. If I stay here, I'll be ate up by muskeeters . . . an' . . . ow-w-w, I got a crick in my neck, too!"

"We get a drink."

"Sho . . . that'll be pleasant. I know a joint where they sell good Dobler's lager."

"I don't know lager."

"Ye'll like it, Johnny. In time I expect to learn ye to like almost anything that'll wet yer whistle."

"I gotta buy me a shirt."

"Sho . . . they's a place north o' Canal . . . near Broad. Ye stay close to me, 'cause I don't want ye should waste yer cash nor get into any trouble." Andrew threw his coat over his arm, shouldered his bundle and they started off.

In a hole in the wall, hardly worth the name of haberdashery, Jean selected two shirts, a blue and a pink. Andrew objected to the pink. "It ain't practical nohow. . . . It'll show dirt like hell," but Jean insisted, for his eyes still held the vision of the bright, little dress flapping on the line of the barge which had passed . . . the dress that made him think of 'tite Marie.

"How much?" he asked the clerk.

"Blue's seventy-five an' the pink, she's fifty . . . dollar-twenty-five that'll be."

"Much money . . ." Jean commented soberly, counting out the silver.

"Why, that's cheap!" argued Andrew. "You ain't never bought a shirt before, I guess. I've paid two-three dollars in my day . . . when I was . . . er . . . makin' money. . . . That's a swell tie . . . that red," he remarked, his eyes lighting up.

"How much?" Jean inquired again.

"Fifty. . . ."

"I take it," decided Jean.

"You don't need no tie," objected Andrew.

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"It's for you," said Jean graciously.

"You keep your money. . . ."

"I want ye to have it. Here. . . ."

"Gawd! . . . that'll be swell! I'll wear it Sundays with my black shirt. C'mon . . . we'll drop in next door."

In the saloon Jean threw a coin ostentatiously upon the counter and bawled out "W'iskey!"

"Nothin' doin'! Keep yer money. This one's on me. Lager, it'll be, friend, lager . . . for two. Ye got to keep your wits about ye till we sign up and get out of this here town."

"Yes," acquiesced Jean affably. If lager was the style, then let it be lager!

The bar-keep was wall-eyed and, for the life of him, Jean couldn't make out whether his unfriendly stare was directed toward himself or the farmer who had entered just behind them.

"Been in taown long?" he inquired.

"Askin' me?" Andrew parried. "Not too long, but long enough to be ate up by the muskeeters."

"Then ye musta been down by South Bay," he drawled, with Yankee perspicacity.

"Mebbe . . . or East Bay either . . . ye can't tell, Brother," Andrew fenced.

"*Moi* . . . I'm hungry," interrupted Jean, pushing his empty mug aside.

"Sho . . . so'm I. We ain't et since breakfast. They's a place just around the corner. C'mon."

"Come back to-night. We serve free san'widges with the drinks," called the bar-keep after them.

"Nosey!" commented Andrew tersely. "We ain't goin' into that dump again. He's too inquis'tive. Besides, his eyes made me nervous. They's other places an' good ones, too, nearer the Barn . . . and the hotel's got the best lager in town, as I was sayin'. Now, let's see . . . that place ain't moved, has it? Naw . . . there 'tis . . . 'Burkit's Home Restaurant for Ladies an' Gents'" he read. "'Best dinner served in town for 25 cents.' Well, we'll see," and he yanked at the latch of the screen-door, hanging loosely from its hinges. It pulled open with a jerk and they entered. A fringe, crudely cut from newspaper, flapped in Jean's face.

"What's that?" he grunted.

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"Funny little dingus to keep off the flies. We'll set at the table down by the kitchen door," Andrew decided out loud.

"No," argued Jean. "We see better here."

"Sho do, and they can see us, too, so we'll set over there."

"Red-striped, fringed napkins were stuck like decorations in the heavy tumblers. The waitress advanced from the kitchen, dumped the tumblers to rid them of their bouquets and filled them with water, tepid and yellow, from a nicked carafe. She gave Andrew a cursory glance and found him not to her taste, then she turned her full attention upon Jean.

"French . . . ha?"

"Yes," Jean beamed.

"I am French too . . . an' my Mama. We live around the Mountain. My name is Katie. . . . P'raps ye'd. . . ."

"Sho," affirmed Andrew. "You live in the French settlement. I been to Whitehall before, and I've heard of that place, too, where all the Canucks live. . . ."

"So . . . smarty . . .?"

"C'mon, get busy with our order. What ye got to eat?" Andrew demanded.

She drew a long breath and started, "Pork an' beans . . . ham an' eggs . . . mutton-stew . . . corn-beef hash, pork-chops, fried an' boiled potatoes . . . string-beans an' summer squawsh, apple, huckleberry an' custard pie . . . doughnuts an' home-made cake. . . ." She paused and breathed deeply, then continued. "Ye needn't get all het up over nothin'. I was only tryin' to be friendly. Are you his mother?"

"Don't bother about bein' friendly. We're leavin' town' to-night, sister."

"Coffee or tea with your order?" she interrogated in business-like tones, at the same time winking at Jean.

"We'll have pork-chops, fried potatoes, beans an' custard-pie . . . an' coffee. Bread comes free with the order?"

"Sure, scottie . . . all ye can eat. . . . My mistake . . . Thought ye was Irish!"

"Bring me'n the kid some corned-beef hash, too . . . and a coupla fried eggs apiece. We may need 'em . . . we ain't et since breakfast. . . ."

"Coffee with the order . . .?"

"Sure."

Jean pointed to the counter, where, under a glass bell-jar, re-

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posed a monumental cake, coated thickly with brown and white icing . . . a whale of a cake. "What's that?" he murmured.

"Cake . . ." she explained.

"Gimme some o' that," he ordered, grinning.

"Oh, no, Johnny, it ain't fresh . . . I'll betcha," grumbled Andrew.

Jean's face fell.

"Well, give it to him, if he's gotta have it, if it'll make him happy."

"Sure, old-timer."

The girl turned her frowzy head in the general direction of the kitchen and yelled an aria, "Two orders . . . pork-chops . . . one corn-beef hash . . . fried potatoes . . . squawsh an' . . ."

"No . . . string beans," corrected Andrew.

"Both comes with the order . . . you might's well take 'em."

"All right, sister."

"Make it string-beans, squawsh . . . two doubles on the fried eggs . . . custard-pie *an'* coffee . . ." she continued in a higher key.

"Say, I ain't so old, sister," objected Andrew, after she had finished.

"Ye ain't so young, neither," she laughed.

"You, with yer Irish tongue and sea-blue eyes! Shanty-Irish, I'll betcha."

"Sure . . . my Pa. . ."

"Sho . . . my Pa, too," acknowledged Andrew, grinning. "My Ma, now, was Scotch. . ."

"I guessed that."

"Pa's folks brought him over in '47. Had an older brother died o' ship-fever on the boat."

"Ever live 'round here?"

"No, my folks follered the Erie canal west, and settled near Lockport. I run away to Buffalo when I was a kid, and shipped on a tramp-steamer. Oh, since then I've seen many a day on the seas, east, west, north and south. I been all over. . . ." Andrew reminisced.

"I'll betcha . . ." answered the girl indifferently.

"Here's the pies, Katie, you cut 'em," came a thin voice from the kitchen.

"Yeah . . .," and she grabbed the two large tin plates waving at the ends of two skinny arms, thrust through the aperture.

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"Custard, ye said?" and she proceeded to cut two huge slabs which she dished loosely upon thick plates. "Say, you, kid, they's a fresh choclit cake out there. Do ye think ye'd like it better'n this fun'ral piece the missus is keepin' against Maggie's weddin'?"

Jean did not understand, but agreed willingly, "Sure. . . ."

"Ye're sure a sweet thing. . . ."

"The weddin' . . . an' when'll that be . . .?" interrupted Andrew.

"Gawd knows."

Two new patrons entered and Katie turned her attention to them, so Andrew and Jean finished their meal in peace, paid their check with an extra nickel for Katie, and left.

"Well, good-bye, an' slam the screen door behind ye . . .," Katie called out.

"C'mon, Jean. The Barn's over there. We'll see what's doin' in the way of a job. Mebbe we'll get track of some boat goin' out to-morrer."

They turned down the lane running across the tracks and there Jean perceived the bulky shadow of the longest shed he had ever seen. The stench from the stables struck his nostrils . . . and with it, the choking smell of old hay. Mists were creeping up from the marshes, bringing swarms of mosquitoes, and a clammy dampness which stuck through their thin garments. Jean was glad enough to follow Andrew inside the Barn, although at first glance, the interior seemed as vast and unfriendly as all outdoors, cavernous as it was and dimly lit with lanterns, hung at long intervals, which sent feeble rays through the festoons of cobwebs. Many of the stalls they passed were empty, but in some of them Jean felt, rather than saw, the presence of the temperamental beast of burden. Masses of muscle and bone exuded waves of animal heat. A hard tail reaching out in the darkness, hitting savagely at a fly, struck him across the back. Further on, a wheezing cough splattered moisture in his face. The passing of the two men caused a general restlessness among the mules, and a jenny whinnied. This brought a query from the circle of light just ahead, "H'llo . . . what d'ye want, an' who be ye?" Jean caught sight of two men, one seated on a discarded carriage-seat, the other on a stool, his back against a feed-bin.

"Just two fellers lookin' for a job on the canal," Andrew answered in due time.

"Ain't heard of no jobs . . . myself, but I only just come on

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duty for the night. You, Levi . . . you heard of anythin'? . . . Anybody wantin' hands?" he addressed his companion.

"Most o' the boats 're full up 's fur 's I know. There's Asaph Billin's might want somebody. He's got two boats tied up in the Basin naow, mor'n ha'f full of lumber, an' he's aimin' to take on a load o' slate to-morrer to fetch to Alb'ny. I see Lem up taown this mornin' an' he was tellin' haow they lost that feller overboard on their las' trip daown. Him an' the mules got throwed into the canal an' drowneded 'fore their eyes . . . all account o' that bull-bouncer, boat-hoggy * on the Nellie Z drivin' plumb acrosst their tow-line. Always had it in fer the poor kid, Lem said. Said he hoped some day him an' Asaph 'd get aholt o' somebody could lick the daylights out o' Bull. Hope they do. Oughter string 'im up like a horse-thief!" Mournfully he sucked his breath through his teeth. "Resky bizzness on the canal these days. . . ."

The other broke in upon his jeremiad, "Ye—ah," he drawled," but at that ye can get killed stayin' right to home, Levi. Lookit Ben gettin' throwed by that there horse, an' Jim Fish struck by lightning' in his own wood-shed! I reckon if you fellers was to go araoun' to the Yule naow, ye might find Lem in the bar-room. He's Asaph's man an' mebbe he'll take one of ye on. Ain't a finer man on the Champlain 'n Asaph, an' his wife, she's the best cook. Got two boats . . . an' the cabins's fixed up right snug."

Andrew thanked them, and he and Jean retraced their steps. Outside the air seemed clean and sweet. It had begun to rain softly, and lights in houses shone indistinctly through penumbras. The men stumbled about in the darkness and, by sheer good luck, reached the hotel entrance, which led directly into the bar, now crowded with citizens, farmers and canal-men, bent over their drinks. Andrew stepped up and ordered ale. "And is a feller by the name o' Lem here?" he inquired politely.

The bar-keep eyed him shrewdly before he jerked his thumb toward a lanky individual at the far end of the counter. "Somebody to see ye, Lem."

"Yep? Well, what's wantin'? I'm Lem Stevens."

"Hear ye might be wantin' hands fer yer boats, an' here we be . . . Andrew J. Brody an' Jean Grenon. An' now, Mr. Stevens, what'll ye have to drink?"

Soberly Lem measured him with a practiced eye before he

* Muleteer.

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deigned to answer. "Call me Lem," he said finally. "Me . . . I'll take rumboose. Come over here where we can talk. We're goin' into the back room, Joe. . . ."

"Awright."

"One kill-devil an' two brandies," Andrew ordered as he and Lem seated themselves at the table. Jean pulled up a chair and stretched his long limbs out across the floor. Lem sniffed at the dead air, foul with the reek of kerosene, and got up to raise a window, but, try as he would, he failed to budge it. "I try," offered Jean, and the sash flew up with a jerk that shook the frame.

"Golly, he's a whale, ain't he?" remarked Lem admiringly. "Naow, let's see . . . which of ye wants to go?" he asked, still eying Jean.

"Both of us . . . or neither," Andrew replied. "Ye see it's like this. . . . I gotta keep an eye on him until he grows up, ye might say."

"Should think he was about growed up now."

"Only seventeen. . . ."

"Big's an ox. . . . Gosh all hemlock, if he ain't! Can he fight?"

"Can he fight? It's all I can do to keep him *from* fightin'."

"Well, we only need one hand, Asaph an' me, but, Asaph, he's bound he's goin' to lick that big murd'rer that bounces for the Nellie Z, an' when Asaph makes up his mind to do a thing, he gen'rally carries it out. I guess we can manage to feed an' sleep another hand . . . an' mebbe find a mite o' work for him, too. Asaph an' me ain't never hired a bouncer yet . . . but I been thinkin' mebbe we'd have to. I s'pose ye're a boat-hoggy . . . er . . . What's yer name anyhow?"

"Andrew. . . . Sure. . . ."

"Andy, I s'pose ye know the canal? I don't want two green hands."

Andrew flopped one knee over the other, drew a long breath and settled down to the recital of his life's story. He wanted nothing better than a sympathetic audience. "Why, man, since I was sixteen I've been on the Lakes, then on the Erie Canal . . . then I tried whalin' for a spell . . . then on a clipper 'round the Horn . . . then I guess 't was the freighter . . . after that the propeller . . . an' then the ship-yards in Philadelphia . . . an', well,

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they's been plenty of other places all over the world. . . . I been on this canal, too . . . once. . . ."

Lem spat and interrupted the discourse. "Then, what the hell are ye back here for, ha?"

"Rollin' stone, I s'pose," answered Andrew philosophically. "Yeah, I reckon I'm a rollin' stone . . . only I couldn't stay to the ship-yards all my life, when they was water to go on, could I? I got a little put by, too . . . an' a clear conscience, so to speak. . . ."

"Well, I gotta be gettin' back. Ye can consider yourselves hired. You, Andy, at the reg'lar rate, an' the kid'll have to take less until he shows his form, then I reckon the ol' man'll treat him handsome. I guess he'll be willin' when he thinks of what Johnny's goin' to do to that bum on the Nellie Z . . . an' if he don't, I'll pay him, myself . . . providin' he licks Bull."

"When do we start?"

"We'll load 'em to-morrer mornin' an' pull out soon's we can. Ye better come on board to-night, so's I'll know where ye be. Lancy, our other mule-driver, 's 'round loose to-night, an' I don't want more'n one to look up to-morrer. Boats're tied up at the Slip below the first lock . . . ready to load. One's the Sary-Ann, named after Ma Billin's. Ye'll find her easy, an' the other's right behind her."

Andrew hesitated. "It might be too late. Don't want to disturb you folks. . . ."

"Ye won't disturb nobody 'ceptin' me, an' I'll be on watch anyhow. The ol' man an missus is goin' to the show at the Opery-House. That's why I gotta get back now. I'll be expectin' ye. . . ."

CHAPTER XIII

BACK on the water once more, after his brief sojourn on land, Jean felt again in his element; secure, safe . . . safe from the importunings of time. Here he could exist in space limited only by the rectangular absolute of the canal and the bordering fertility on either side, hemmed in at night by the enveloping darkness. Then the stars came out and the vastness of the heavens spread grandly, and the spirit soared. The sky was the sailors' world; not the landlubbers'!

Visions of the violet lady crowded into his mind, lulled as it was by the quiet . . . visions somewhat less glorified, to be sure, perhaps even a trifle tarnished, but precious visions, nevertheless, which would fade gradually. Jean knew he was not the same boy who had rowed vigorously away from home. Ah, that innocent one! Since then he had learned to live and suffer like a man, and, Andrew's warning to the contrary, he thought Diadama still the loveliest thing he had ever seen. He was relieved that she had not accepted his offer of marriage, impulsively given and as quickly snatched away by the irate Andrew. Truly this self-appointed guardian had been as mad as the old setting hen back home, when her nest was pillaged!

He was glad, for he had not yet seen enough of the world, so he relaxed contentedly in his bunk, foot to foot with the double bunk where Andrew and Lem lay snoring; and he dreamed and listened to the wooing of the river-frogs . . . a deep bass, answered by a silvery treble, rising from the bog. A breeze came up and the water lapped sluggishly against the broad sides of the hulk. By manoeuvring a bit, raising himself on his elbow and craning his neck, he could peer through the cabin-window. He pulled aside the short cambric curtain, wet with the lake-mist, cool and damp against his cheek, and gazed out upon the magic of the night . . . space extended until Basin and sky were one . . . infinite as the ocean.

Fire-flies flashed here and there through the darkness, gleaming an instant. The rain had ceased, but drops continued to fall from

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the cabin roof. All of a sudden the husk of the ancient moon burst through ragged clouds and dimmed the lanterns of the fire-flies. The world became suddenly dusky green and gold. Jean held his breath, lest the enchantment of the moment be dispelled. The towering cliff took on form above the Basin, as it emerged from the darkness, and black masses of trees, crowning Skene mountain, were silhouetted against a luminous sky. Jean filled his heart with the beauty of it, then rolled over and slept.

He fell asleep to the music of the heavens and woke to the ribald tune of "Susannah", jerked out of a mouth-organ. From the deck of a neighboring barge, it tantalized his ears . . . over and over again. At length the refrain was taken up by another, singing in harsh tenor. . . . "Oh-oo-oo, Susanner, don'-cha cry . . . for me . . . I'm goin' to Alabamer with my banjo on my knee. . . ."

"Shut-up," yelled somebody from the void beyond Jean's range of vision. This enticed him to his feet. If there was going to be a fight, he was going to be there! He reached for his shoes in the semi-darkness, and tip-toed out on deck. Two other tows lay astern of Asaph's, one of them a lemon-squeezer . . . things which had been but silent shadows the night before, now come to life. A rat-faced boy, owner of the mouth-organ, was marching up and down the truncated deck of the lemon-squeezer, to the tune of "Climbing up the Golden Stairs," in which the raw-boned tenor, evidently his father, joined lustily, and to the apparent chagrin of a woman on the deck of the other boat. She was a large woman, massive as the Earth Mother, and she bent over a wooden tub, up to her elbows in soap-suds. Billows of wet red and blue and dun color stuck out of the suds. She kept at her work, trying not to listen to the crazy reiteration of the song, as she stooped to dip her hand into a small wooden keg by her side, and drew forth a fistful of soft soap, which she smeared thickly upon the the shirt she was rubbing.

The urchin regarded her shrewdly, then laid aside his harmonica and joined his father in a piping soprano.

"You two must be lookin' for trouble, else ye'd go in an' mind your own business. Wake *him* up an' there'll be the devil to pay, and *somebody* may get hurt."

The two singers answered not, but bawled the louder, climbing golden stairs, sliding gleefully down again, then as joyously mounting . . . a giddy toboggan of song.

Jean enjoyed the excitement, as he watched from the deck of

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his boat, the second in Asaph's string. He slid his legs luxuriously over the edge and cooled his feet in the water. Suddenly he saw a door burst open behind the woman. "Now ye done it!" she commented laconically. "I told ye!" and she wiped the suds from her arms and taking a position, hands-on-hips, waited for the next scene. A brawny brute of man stumbled up the steps, his hair tousled, his face red to bursting, his eyes blinking. "So?" he bellowed into the dawn. "So 'tis you! I might a' knowed there wasn't another such varmint on the canal! Raisin' hell 'fore 'tis light! I've a mind to jump over there an' blast the daylight out of ye!"

"He can't, Paw! He can't . . . 'cause he ain't steady 'nough on his pins. He's drunk again . . . drunk again . . . drunk again!" shrieked the boy, blowing triumphantly upon his wheezing instrument. "An' I can lick yer kid, too!"

His father guffawed.

"Try it an' he'll turn ye over an' spank yer bottom!" yelled the outraged sleeper. "An' tell yer ol' man, ye sassy brat, to cease his brayin'. There's asses 'nough on the canals to do all the heehawin' 'thout him helpin' 'em out! He'd better tend to his sick woman."

The other leered and struck up Dixie, which broke out half a key higher on the mouth-organ. And, goaded beyond endurance, the tortured one snatched up the bucket of soft-soap and let it fly at the singer's head. It missed its mark by the merest fraction of an inch, but the sticky contents spilled generously over the songsters. The man on the lemon-squeezer howled and kicked the bucket into the lake, while the youngster went bawling below.

The large woman swore softly as she watched her pail sink from sight, then she whirled about with amazing agility and addressed her husband. "Ye big lout! Now ye've gone an' lost me my bucket an' the soap I made with my own hands! I'd oughter to lam ye one . . . gettin' drunk an' fightin' . . .!"

"Now . . . now, Maggie, I'll get ye another . . . an' what's more I'll buy ye some bar-soap, so I will," he promised her.

Mollified, she turned back to her washing. "I hope to live long 'nough to see somebody lambast that whinin' skunk! The way he treats his wife . . . tsch . . . tsch. . . ."

"I'm aimin' to do it myself," he muttered, as he went below.

Jean was somewhat disappointed, for nothing had happened really . . . just words. He drew his feet out of the water and,

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stepping on the roof of the cabin, let them hang over the side to dry in the cool air. The cabin-door of the Sary-Ann opened at this point, and a man past middle age emerged and mounted the short flight of steps. No amount of sun and rain could brown that fair skin, which shone pinkly beneath his broad-brimmed hat, and gave him somewhat the appearance of a country squire. He was dressed neatly in black, somewhat rusty about the shoulders. Jean recognized an air of well-being.

"So you're the new lad, I take it," he asked genially, strolling aft until he could rest his arm on the tiller.

"Yessir."

"The bouncer Lemon hired, eh . . . without a yes'r no from me?"

"Bouncer? I don't know bouncer . . . Mist' Billings . . .," Jean answered.

"Well, I'll tell ye. Watch me, lad. It's like this . . . that's what a bouncer is," and he fought a smart round of sciamachy, sparring in the air and landing a powerful whack somewhere near the chin of an invisible antagonist. He grunted with satisfaction. "I could have done it myself in the old days . . . if I was forty years younger. See what I mean?"

"Ah . . . ye want me to lick 'em?"

"That's right . . . you got the idea! Lick one in partic'lar . . . a certain bull-bouncer I could mention." He turned away abruptly and called down the line of boats, "Well, now, Maggie, I'm glad to see ye. How are ye, an' how's Casey? I heard him up, so I thought I might 's well get up myself. Couldn't sleep for all the belly-achin' goin' on." He spoke amiably enough, and strolled down the plank and along the tow-path toward Casey's boat, The Emerald Isle. "Casey's drunk again, I s'pose?"

"Hello, Mr. Billin's. Yes, Casey took a drink or two," she winked broadly. "You know Casey! How are ye, an' how's your wife?"

"Fine, thanks. Them brandy-smashes they a 'vertise! Brandy-smashes, and 'nough said!"

"Reckon Jim's took somethin' himself or he never would 'a been bellerin' like he done . . . with that poor, sick wife of his, too."

"Ruhamy . . . sick again? Don't seem like she's ever well."

"Ye . . . ah, expectin' again, an' her hardly over the last time . . . an' losin' both them others."

"Dear . . . dear, I must go an' tell Maw. She'd ought to be

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able to do somethin' for her. S'pose they come in along with you last night?"

"Yeah. We left Peddy to the locks in Comstock an' I says to myself, 'Good riddance.' He didn't have the cash for toll, but he musta got it somewheres an' followed right along. Casey wouldn't give it to him. I s'pose that's what made 'im mad."

"Maw and I was to the Opery House last night."

"Was ye now? I'll bet it was good. I been tryin' to get Casey to go ever since last year, but ye know where he spends *his* money. Yes, we come up with coal we unloaded to Fort Ann, an' we'll go down with wood, same 's always. I take it Jim come up empty. I heard 'im say somethin' about bein' cheated out of a shipment of wool for the factory in Fort Ann, but ye can't never believe a word he says. I was hopin' he'd go on down to Ti to visit her folks a spell . . . till things gets over with Ruhamy . . . but I guess he aims to keep follerin' us right along . . . an' him an' Casey scrappin' all the way! Jim, he just kicked my good soap-bucket into the lake. I wisht they'd quit scrappin' now on 'count of Ruhamy. . . ."

"Ruhamy was sick the last time we run into Peddy."

"Gawd knows why she ever took it into her head to up an' marry Jim Peddy. I ain't the only one that don't think Lou Ella throwed herself into the canal. I still say Jim could 'a explained it, if the law'd made 'im. I don't see what got into Ruhamy to marry him, knowin' how he treated his first wife. The Peddys was never no good."

"Sure, I know . . . a mean lot." Asaph agreed with alacrity. "We're loadin' slate this mornin'. Got some lumber on board, too. I guess it's goin' to be terrible hot, but I'd like to hustle up an' get done this mornin', so's we can pull out this afternoon. Maggie, that's our new hand . . . hired 'im for a bouncer. Think he looks any good? I'll have to let Casey give 'im the once-over, but I'm reck'nin' on his lickin' Bull Lampo. Think he can?"

"He's built heavy, but I don't know."

"I think he can, with a little trainin'. Mean trick Bull played on that there kid of ourn. Maw'll never get over it. He was like a son to her . . . like our own we'd lost. . . ."

"He's a mean one, that Bull. I had a run-in with 'im once, but I basted 'im over the head with my wash-board . . . busted it, too. He never said a word. I guess he was scared to hit a woman."

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"Well-ll-ll, glad to see ye, Maggie. I must be gettin' back. Maw'll have breakfast ready, an' this early mornin' air makes ye hungry. Ye tell Casey about the kid, an' if him an' Peddy keep on fightin', we'll set the kid on 'em. Tell 'im that!"

"Sure," laughed Maggie, "but don't ye forget that I can lick Casey, myself."

"Ye're the best skipper, man or woman, on the canal! I'm always tellin' Maw so . . . fair weather or foul! Ye'd oughter make your man give up drink though."

"Aw, he ain't so worse . . . only when he gets to a town like this, he don't seem to have any sense. He just goes off the handle."

"I'll tell Maw ye're here." Billings strolled back to his boat. "Come on, lad. . . . What'll I call ye? What's your name?" he called to Jean.

"Jean . . . Johnny, Andy calls me."

"Well, come on, Johnny, an' we'll get us some victuals. Seems like a year since I've et. I expect home-cookin' 'll taste good to ye."

"Sun . . . comin' up," remarked Jean, pointing toward the declivity where the mountain curved off eastward.

"Kind o' red, too. Guess it's goin' to be a scorcher . . . I say it'll be hot loadin' to-day," he raised his voice in the attempt to make Jean understand. Asaph gazed at the precipitous cliff of limestone rising above the Basin. Houses were perched like bird-cages here and there, and a lumber-wagon was crawling at a snail's pace down the steep trail. The sun paved a path of molten gold across the quiet water, ruffled only slightly at the locks, where a trickle spilled from the higher level through the sluice. Across the meadow, toward the south and west, purple fog still hung, as if loath to flee before the light of day. Beyond the Slip, in the deep channel, running east, the skeleton of a derelict lay partly submerged, its ribs bleaching in sun and rain. Giant cat-tails waved about its prow and stern. Asaph's eyes grew dreamy as he looked at it, as he had a hundred times before, and thought how grand the hand-hewn beams still were.

"This is the life, Johnny! Nothin' shuttin' ye in . . . an' the wind an' rain, an' sun an' fog teaching ye to think for yourself, an' not be afraid to be alone with your thoughts. Travelin' most the time like gypsies, but learnin' all the time. Meetin' folks that's got the fear o' the Lord in their hearts, an' folks that ain't . . . good folks an' bad, but mostly good. . . ." He sighed and glanced

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at Jean. "I forgot ye don't understand much English. I been ramblin' on . . . philosophizin', as Maw calls it. I guess ye ain't understood half what I said. . . ."

"Sure," smiled Jean. "Ye mean the water an' mountains are grand?"

"I guess that's about it. It's just that the mountains and water are always right here when ye get back to 'em, no matter where ye've been. They're always the same an' always different, too, I guess . . . everlastin', sort of. . . ."

"Asaph! . . . Asaph!"

"Comin', Maw."

"Breakfast 's all ready. Call the boys."

"Lemon! Lee-mon, ye up yet?"

"He's comin', Mr. Billin's," called Andrew, emerging, head and shoulders, through the cabin-door.

Lem followed, yawning widely. "Mornin', Asaph. Andrew, meet the boss."

"How d' ye do."

Each man must stoop to enter the cabin of the Sary-Ann. Jean's nose quivered in anticipation before the rich aroma of coffee, ham and eggs. He stared shyly at the woman who stood, smiling, in the middle of the crowded room. Her white hair curled crisply away from her high forehead, and three jolly wrinkles lurked at the corners of her gray eyes, and Jean noticed that she smiled more with her eyes than with her mouth. He liked her. Beyond her was a little shelf, with its festoon of crocheted lace, bracketed to the wall, and there, framed in red plush, Jean recognized her face and Asaph's . . . both of them much younger than they were now. Two vases of milk-glass bore snow-scenes on their fat sides, and bunches of last year's Everlasting in their mouths. A mirror in a round, gilt frame hung above, and lent the shelf a festive air.

"Maw, these are the new boys," Asaph was explaining. "Andrew . . . an' this big feller's Johnny. . . ."

"Glad to meet ye. Set right down, boys an' get to eatin' before things get cold. I like my victuals real hot."

The table was a broad shelf of white pine, extending almost the entire length of the cabin, and when not in use was hooked up against the wall, out of the way. In a tiny alcove, partitioned off, was the cook-stove, with shelves all around for pots and pans and coarse, white china. To the left of this, behind a curtain of pink calico, was the bed. Jean was fascinated with the compactness of

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the apartment, and remained standing after the rest had seated themselves. Now Mrs. Billings waved him into the vacant place, and Jean blushed, because he had not thought to urge her to sit down, and stumbled to his feet again. "I'd rather have you boys eat first an' get out of my way, if ye don't mind. Then I won't have to keep jumpin' up to get somethin'. Ye sit right down, Johnny. Lemon, where's Lancy?"

"He promised he'd be here in time for breakfast, Sary. I hope he didn't run afoul of trouble in some saloon up town."

"Oh, he'll be back all right, Lemon," Asaph assured him. "Maw, Jim Peddy tied up last night."

"Yes, I see the lemon-squeezer this mornin'."

"Meanest pole-cat on the canal," grumbled Lem, pouring his coffee into his saucer and blowing upon it to cool it. "Yep . . . an' now we can look out for trouble and a lot of it, mark my word. Trouble just naturally follers him around."

"I know," said Ma. "Paw, how's Ruhamy? Did ye ask?"

"Ailin', Maw, so Maggie Casey just told me."

"I'm glad Maggie's boat's in. Well, p'raps Maggie and I can do somethin' for Ruhamy . . . poor child."

"Jim and Casey's been fightin', as usual."

"That ain't nothin' new," said Lem.

"Well, that won't make any difference with Maggie. She's a good-hearted soul. Lemon, pass the biscuits to Andrew."

"Those gol durned fools . . . always fightin' an' never gettin' nowheres!" snorted Lem. "Not that I blame Casey none . . . Jim pesters him so. Take a feller with the patience o' Job to put up with Jim's meanness."

"What's the matter with Ruhamy, Paw?"

"The same as last year, Maw . . . an' the year before that." Asaph hesitated, looking guardedly at Jean.

"An' she lost them two."

"He'd oughter be shot," and Lem reached for another egg.

A loud whistle, embellished with fancy trills and delicate nuances, reverberated through the stillness. They all paused to listen.

"That Jim!" offered Jean, trying to show his interest in the conversation.

"No, Johnny," Ma corrected him. "That's Lancy. Nobody but our Lancy ever whistles like that. It's like the birds I heard in the South once."

THE TOWMAN

"Yep, here he is. I guess ye smelled Sary's cookin' way up town, Lance. Nothin' but an empty stummick and the thought o' food would ever make ye lift yer foot off'n the rail an' come moggin' home." Lem spoke caustically, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

Lancy stood for a moment at the top of the short flight of steps and peered down. He was rather tall and decidedly lean, with a sandy beard, cut like General Grant's, and when he stooped to clatter below, his legs moved loose-jointedly. He was grinning good-humoredly and the grin displayed his strong, white teeth to advantage. His eyes were striking . . . gray, rather tired of life, but, at the same time, gentle, deep and intelligent. Jean now saw that his body was not so tall; it was his long neck which gave him the appearance of being taller than the average . . . as if he had stretched it beyond its length, gazing off over the heads of the crowd, seeing visions beyond those allotted to man's limited scope. "Mornin', ma'am. . . . Mornin', boss," he said softly. "Howdy, ev'rybody . . . and Lem. Well, I see ye're the same ol' grouch I left behind me yestiddy."

"Do set down, Lancy. It's biscuits an' honey . . . the kind ye like," Ma Billings caressed him with her voice.

"Meet the new hands . . . Andy an' Johnny, Lance."

"Howdy. Glad to know ye."

"Howdy. . . ."

"*Bonjour.*"

"Say, Lance, what d'ye think of our idear? Me'n Asaph hired this great lad here for a bouncer. We intend, of course, that between times he can sort of divy up things with you an' Andrew an' me."

"Bouncer . . . that so, Lem? Looks like ye got some sense after all. Ye don't always make a mistake when I ain't around. Howdy, young feller!" Lancy's eyes shone with warm interests. Here was somethng new which might break the dull monotony of his long hours on the tow-path. He studied the boy for a long moment, then broke another biscuit and spread it lavishly with butter and honey.

"Do ye like the buckwheat as well as the clover, Lancy?"

"I don't know but what I do, Mis' Billin's."

"Will ye have more coffee?"

"Why don't *you* set down?"

"I will later."

THE TOWMAN

He took another bite, then turned to Jean. "Well, my lad, we'll keep ye fed up plenty. . . . Maw'll see to that. An' keep ye in trainin'. Folks, I heard in town that the Nellie Z's startin' out from Troy to-morrer. We'll meet up with her sure."

"Sure," nodded Billings.

"So? So?" Lem murmured sententiously. "Lance, ye know somethin' about fighters, don't ye? S'pose you take the lad on . . . take charge of trainin' him. I'll speak to Casey, too."

"Sure . . . maybe he needs foot-work and some sci'ntific punches and the like o' that. . . ."

"I been in the ring myself," Andrew reminded him.

"Good! Then the both of us'll train him."

"Johnny is pretty good without any trainin'. He's a born fighter, he is," bragged Andrew.

"If we don't stop talkin' an' get busy now, we won't pull out of here to-day, what with Casey an' Jim Peddy tied up 'long-side an' ready to beat us to the locks. An' ye all know Maggie's a horse for work," remarked Lem, rising.

CHAPTER XIV

LANCY hung behind the others, in order to speak to Ma Billings privately. "How's Ruhamy, ma'am? Did ye hear?"

"Poorly, Lancy, poorly. Paw was just talkin' to Maggie Casey. She told him."

"Too bad. What do ye suppose she ever see in Jim Peddy? I worked for her folks two summers and they was fine people. It don't seem right for Ruhamy to be took without women-folks around to help, does it? Why, her paw and maw would turn over in their graves!"

"Lance! Hey, Lance!"

"I'm comin', Lem."

"I want ye should check up on the comp'ny's count. Asaph's got to go up-town."

"Ye do the checkin', Lem. Ye like book-keepin', an' I don't. I'll help with the hoistin', but the count will be correct. It always is."

"I don't aim to trust nobody without I see it with my two eyes. They ain't puttin' nothin' over on me . . . them *Ver*-mont Yanks."

"You being born across the crick on the York-State side makes a heap of difference, don't it, Lem? An' while ye're speakin' of *Ver*mont Yanks, I'd like to remind ye, I was born over there myself. . . ."

"Don't I know it, an' have I ever held it against ye? I've put up with ye for years . . . just because ye're the best boat-hoggy on the canal."

"Oh, well, of course, if ye put it that way. . . ."

The Basin was humming with activity. While Asaph's men loaded slate, perspired, and drank spring water, seasoned with vinegar, ginger and sugar, others loaded lumber, and still others unloaded coal. The slate had been hauled through the gloom of the summer night from quarries in Poultney and Granville. Now the drivers had unharnessed the jaded horses and they stood, unhitched, under a row of willows, their heads drooping dejectedly as they slept, with their limp feed-bags still attached.

THE TOWMAN

Andrew and Lancy kept up a desultory stream of talk . . . life, the canal; the river; the sea; the civil war, still fresh in their minds; and Jean. "The lad's gotta be like streak-lightnin'. Bull's some slow on his feet an' he ain't got no brains, but when he hits . . . gosh! He's a slugger, an' when he slugs, he slugs hard . . . an' then, too, he's chock full o' mean tricks. That's why he won't fight in the open."

"Johnny thinks quick an' it ain't as if he ain't had no experience. Why, he's licked a raft of them lumber-jacks, he tells me. He's licked Injuns an' Canucks an' Irish . . . an' . . ."

"So's Bull an' he's a mean cuss."

"I'll lick him out of the daylights . . . sure!" boasted Jean.

They both laughed.

"The lad's sure built for a fighter. Mebbe after he's had more experience we could take him to New York. What d' ye think?" Lancy's eyes glowed in anticipation. "I was sort of third assistant trainer to Con Orem, when I was some younger than I be now. We'd gone through to the city with a load of potatoes . . . the last load through that fall, an' it took some brain-work on Lem's part to see us through. We was tied up at Shadyside for the winter, an' I wanted something to do, so I hung around Con's quarters till they took me on to get rid of me."

"His grandpaw way back was ol' Jean Grenon, the giant, who smashed a feller's neck with one blow! Jean, he takes after him," continued Andrew, not to be outdone.

"Whew!" Lancy whistled, impressed, although not knowing that famous Grenon. "Golly! He's built swell! See them muscles!"

Ma Billings brought out a pan of fresh doughnuts. "Thought ye'd like a snack, boys." Jean stopped work immediately, leaned over the edge of the barge, dipped the shining tin-dipper into the Basin and threw the water over his head. He laughed and shook himself like a puppy.

Over on the Emerald Isle, Casey and a wiry Frenchman-from-around-the-Mountain raised lumber, plank by plank, to Maggie, who in turn lowered it to an invisible helper in the hold. Jean watched them, as he bit into a warm doughnut and smiled broadly at Ma Billings. It occurred to him that Maggie Casey was stronger even than his own mother, Grande Marie. Here she was, working against three men and telling them in no uncertain terms to hurry up!

"Take some fried-cakes over to Maggie and her boys," Ma

THE TOWMAN

directed him, and he jumped lightly across the deck and down the plank. "An', Maggie, when ye can rest a spell, come on over to my cabin an' have a cup of tea. The water's always boilin', ye know."

"It's good to see ye again, Mis' Billin's. I'll sure be over, if I can get these lazy loafers workin', so 's I can leave 'em for five minutes."

"How are ye?" inquired the Frenchman-from-around-the-Mountain, as he reached for a fried-cake.

"All right," answered Jean.

"Hey, Mis' Billin's . . . same good cook!" he shouted to Ma.

"Thank ye, Pete." Jean returned with the empty pan. "That's Pete Pawquette," she explained to him and Andrew who were about to take their turn in the hold. "Haven't seen him since he married that squaw-woman who makes baskets. All last winter, they tell me, they was livin' in a cave over east of here, and he had lung-fever. She pulled him through . . . with herb-med'cine. They're smart, those Injuns, but I wouldn't want 'em around, they're so dirty. Pete's a diver."

"What's that?" queried Jean.

"Feller goes down into the water an brings up dead bodies . . . or mebbe treasure . . . or pearls like they do in the far East. *Plongeur* . . . that's what ye call it," Andrew explained.

"Ah, *oui*," Jean shouted, and chinned himself in order to get a better view of Pete.

"The one with the silver hoops in his ears," said Ma, as she went below.

Asaph returned from town, walking slowly, mopping his brow and fanning himself with his hat. "How ye comin', boys?"

"Waitin' for another load. Feller's got a hot-box back on the road a ways. They've gone up to help him. He'll be comin' pretty soon."

"We won't get through to-day, Lemon. I guess we won't pull out 'fore to-morrer. Still there ain't no rush . . . not 's if 't was potatoes."

"Guess ye're right, Asaph."

"Jim ain't loadin' yet?"

"Naw, the lazy coot! He'll wait for some one to come an' beg him to take their stuff . . . then expect somebody else to help him load."

THE TOWMAN

"Lem, I s'pose we'll have to see him through, considerin' Ruhamy's condition an' all."

"I'd like to see him in hell first! If we help him out, the mean fox'll beat us to the locks, like as not, . . . an' then he won't have the cash an' we'll have to stake him to the toll to get him out of our way. I don't know why the water ain't took an' drowned him long ago . . . but I guess rats likes bilge-water," Lem concluded cryptically. Asaph pondered over the statement for some time, wondering just what he meant, but gave it up and sought Ma Billings in the cabin.

"Ye got the flour?" she asked.

"Yes, they're deliverin' it with the rest of the stuff ye ordered this afternoon. We'll start to-morrer."

"Not to-day?"

"No, can't get loaded."

"That's nice. Then I'll go an' call on Ruhamy this afternoon."

Ma served a hearty meal promptly at noon, and after she had cleared up and set the cabin to rights again, she brought her rocking-chair and darning basket out on the roof of the cabin and seated herself comfortably. Lancy leapt up from the hold to adjust a green cotton umbrella he had fastened to the back of her chair by some ingenious contrivance. Secretly he fancied himself an inventor of no mean skill, and Ma thought so, too. Very soon Maggie, clad in a freshly ironed black and white calico, came up from her cabin. Ma Billings waved to her, and then watched her cover the distance between the two boats with her powerful stride, famous the length of the canal. Maggie was getting heavy on her feet, she noticed, and she puffed a little, as she swung with ponderous ease up the gang-plank. Perhaps, however, she was merely snorting her contempt for anything so cussed mean as a lemon-squeezer.

Andrew, waving Lancy aside, hopped agilely down into the cabin and back again with another chair, which he placed beside Ma's, then lighting his pipe, sauntered off toward the other boat, where the men were lounging and yarning, while they awaited the arrival of the last load of slate.

Loud thumping resounded from the bowels of the Emerald Isle, which told them, as it was intended to, that work was still in progress there, even though Maggie had quit them flat. Presently, however, Casey and Pawquette came up and strolled off in the direction of the nearest saloon, pails in hand.

THE TOWMAN

Maggie saw them. "Beer!" she spat out contemptuously. "Always beer . . . an' if it ain't beer, 't is w'iskey! Now, see here, you two, you hustle right back an' get to work!" she bawled after them. "Ye needn't think ye can waste yer time, just 'cause I'm off visitin' an' restin' my legs a bit!"

"Aw . . . I'm goin' to get yer soap, like I said I would," protested Casey.

"Yes, ye are! But ye hurry back, both of ye! I'm settin' right here where I can watch which way ye turn, too!" She removed her large straw hat, mopped her forehead, now scarlet from the heat, and relaxed against the back of the rocker. "Guess we're goin' to get a thunderstorm . . . air's so heavy."

"Wisht we would. It'd cool the air some. It's been frightful to-day, ain't it? How'd ye like some cold tea, Maggie . . . 'stead o' hot?"

"Oh, I'd like it fine."

"It's kind o' refreshin', I think. Paw drinks it out o' the spout, unless I'm right there to stop him." She laid aside the sock she was mending and went below.

"Now, don't ye fuss none," said Maggie politely.

"Ever'thing's ready. All I have to do is bring it out."

Maggie listened to the clinking of china and silver, and presently Mrs. Billings came back, bearing upon a painted, tin tray her best china pot, brought years before from the Orient by a down-East, sea-captain grandfather; two plates with cut-out borders; delicate cups and saucers with patterns in pink lustre; and a thicker plate heaped high with cookies and cake.

"Aw, ye shouldn't 'a did it . . . an' yer best chiny, too, an' the furrin tea-pot! Tst . . . tst . . . an' the grand cake with the boiled frostin'! Ye shouldn't," she remonstrated again, but Ma could see that she was pleased. "I don't know when I see anything so good," she said, almost sadly.

"Ye're tired out, Maggie. Ye work too hard."

"Ain't so young no more. Ah, mebbe 't is the heat that's gets me, an' me so fat an' eatin' like a hawg!"

"We're all of us gettin' older, Maggie. Sometimes . . . times like last winter, when I was took sick an' lay there wonderin' what would become o' Paw . . . I get to thinkin' mebbe it's time to stop an' settle down somewheres . . . an' then again I know Paw'd never be satisfied just settin' still an' not seein' the landscape movin' past. . . ."

THE TOWMAN

"I want to die with my boots on," declared Maggie.

Ma poured out the tea and handed the cup to her guest. "Help yerself to cream an' sugar. I thought after we'd rested a spell, it might be nice to go over an' see if we can do anything for Ruhama. I been waitin' fer Jim to go away."

"I have said I'd never step foot on that measly lemon-squeezer again, 'count of Peddy's bein' so mean, but I s'pose I'll have to. Can't bear to think of her layin' there, sufferin', an' him not doin' a thing, the striped pole-cat! I brought this along, thinkin' mebbe she'd like it. D'ye think so?" Maggie unwrapped the finely woven towel she had laid on her lap, and took out a baby's dress, an exquisite thing, freshly laundered, but creamy with age. "I s'pose she ain't took a stitch, layin' on her back all the while."

"Why, Maggie, ain't that Manus' christenin' robe, the one ye showed me once? Ye ain't goin' to part with that?"

"Sure, what good is it? Shaemus wored it, too, an' he's most growed up. I've had it twenty-one years, come Michaelmas. It only brings back mem'ries. Think she'd like it?"

"Of course, she would. It's lovely with all that nice lace."

"I used to make pretty lace . . . me'n my sisters. Ye wouldn't believe it now, to look at my hands."

"Paw went over to tell Jim he'd help him loadin'."

"He don't deserve it none."

"I know. That's what Lemon said."

"An' ye ain't pullin' out to-night?"

"No."

"Meself, I've about decided to go to-morrer, too. No use hurryin' . . . jest the two of us . . . me'n Casey, ye might say, . . . breakin' our necks to get through. Shaemus is too young yet to help much. Sometimes I get to thinkin' he come too late."

"Ye ain't heard from Manus?"

"Naw. Sometimes I get to thinkin' he's dead . . . then something tells me he ain't . . . an' I keep on hopin' . . . an' I burn a light all night in the cabin. . . ."

"That's right, Maggie, we got to keep right on hopin'. He'll feel the call an' come home some time. Have some more tea."

"Don't care if I do. Ye're real comfortin', Mis' Billin's. There's a smart lad ye hired fer bouncer . . . strappin' big feller. . . ."

"An' a nice boy, too, an' ketchin' on to English real smart."

"Don't it make ye kind o' crowded?"

THE TOWMAN

"No, I had Lancy hang the hammick, Paw bought me, in their cabin. Johnny's use' to sleepin' sailor-fashion . . . him an' Andrew. He'll be more comfortable in a hammick than in a short bunk, anyhow. Have another piece o' cake. No? Well, ye must take some to Casey."

"I don't never get no time to bake anythin' fancy, an' poor Casey loves good things, too. We better be goin' to Ruhama's now. Jim's leavin', an' takin' the boy with him."

"Then we can talk an' not be disturbed." Ma took the tea-things below and returned with a small flask, which she wrapped in a clean handkerchief. "I'll tell her to keep the spirits where Jim can't get at the bottle."

"He'll smell it out, the weasel! Ye know I don't like them sawed-off lemon-squeezers none," Maggie grumbled as they mounted the plank, set insecurely. It teetered beneath their weight. "Always afeared I'll step too fur an' land in the water."

They stumbled blindly down the steps, leaving the brilliance of daylight to enter the gloomy interior below. Maggie blinked until her eyes became accustomed to the twilight and when she was able to discern anything, she saw that Ma was rubbing the sick woman's head. Ruhama lay in her crumpled bed in the dingy cabin, into which the stink of bilge-water had crept, and would stay until the end of time. The lemon-squeezer had never been a dry boat, even before the days when she was laid up in dry-dock, decapitated and reconditioned. More than once Jim had fooled farmers into shipping grain aboard her, only to have it spoil below the hatches, and their profits rot away with the decay of the cargo.

Ma Billings sniffed the dead air distastefully and Maggie burst forth with an expressive, "Phew!" which seemed to rouse Ruhama. "Oh, it's you," she said weakly, but not at all surprised. "Sit down, if ye can find a place. Ev'rythin's so messed up since I was took sick. I'm ashamed to have anybody come in."

"Now don't let that bother your poor head one bit."

"Don't ye worry, darlin'."

"How are ye feelin'?"

Ruhama looked at them with her great, sad eyes. "Oh . . . not very well," she whispered, her lips trembling. "Oh, just awful! . . . awful!" she admitted and tears rolled down her cheeks. "I wisht it was all over."

THE TOWMAN

"There . . . there, we're goin' to get ye all fixed up fine. We'll make the bed up clean, first thing we do. Ye'll be more comfortable."

"I don't believe there's any clean sheets or cases. . . ."

"Ye mean that whelp ain't . . . ?" Maggie started to say. "The hellion. . . ."

"Maggie, you just call to Lancy to bring some beddin' over, an' we'll wash these later," Ma put in hastily.

"I'll wash 'em myself. I ain't much on fancy cookin', but I can wash. Now, ye let me take care of these, Mis' Billin's."

"Well, we'll see. Now, Maggie, just step up an' call to Lancy an' tell him to bring clean linen. He knows where I keep ev'ry-thing."

It took Lancy no time at all to do as he was bidden. He cleared the plank in one stride and reached the cabin-door in two more, then he slipped down silently, and, as he said afterward, "There was Ruhamy, layin' there like a pale lily, blooming in a muck-hole." Lancy just stood and stared at her, then threw the linen into Ma's arms, and with his heart too full to speak, dashed back up the steps. Ma stared after him, her mouth open. Lancy must have thought a lot of Ruhamy, but Ma had little time to ponder, for she must bathe the sick woman and make the bed, while Maggie piled up the dirty dishes.

"Have ye got anythin' ready for the little one," Ma asked quietly.

"No . . . no . . . that is . . . just *their* things . . . the ones *they* never needed. They're in the middle draw' of the dresser."

"Do ye want we should look 'em over and see what ye need?"

Ruhama nodded and turned her head to the wall.

"Ruhamy, 'fore ye go back to sleep, look at this. See what Maggie brought ye. Ain't it lovely?"

Ruhama smiled apathetically, without emerging from the lethargy, which had become her sole means of defence. "It's nice," she said. "It'll do to lay him out in," she whispered.

"Why, Ruhamy, ye mustn't talk like that!" Ma protested, but Maggie watched her keenly and nodded her head.

"An' I heard the banshee keenin' in the night," she murmured.

"It was the wind, screamin' around the mountain," said Ma quickly, glancing at Ruhama, who gave no evidence of having sensed the meaning, and presently she slept again.

The two women poured over the sorry little garments of un-

THE TOWMAN

bleached muslin. "Not a thing ready but the dead babies' duds, and them all yella and damp with mould," mourned Ma.

"An' not a stitch of flannin' an' babies has got to have wool next their skins, 'specially any brat born on this ol' tank." Maggie shook her head dolefully.

"Paw bought me some nice flannel this very mornin'. I'll make it up for her."

"Ye planned to do it all the time! It's just like ye, always thinkin' of somebody else! Well, I can take these clo'es home an' wash 'em."

"I'll help ye, Maggie."

"Ye will not. Ye can cook somethin' nice an' tasty for her. I can't do that. . . ."

"Kind of sad for the new baby to have to wear . . . dead things, ain't it, Maggie?"

"It won't make no diff'rance about this baby, for there's death in the very air of the place. Makes me shiver. The walls mouldy like a tomb . . . I can smell death. . . ."

"Why, Maggie, how ye talk! Hush! She might hear!"

"She knows."

Suddenly thunder rolled above their heads. "The storm's comin'," said Ma. "If ye want to go, I'll stay with her till it's over."

"We'll both stay," declared Maggie, settling back in her chair.

The storm came galloping, and the dusky interior grew darker. Ma got up and lighted a lamp and Maggie pulled the shutters toward the west, to keep out the rain. Thunder boomed and crashed and roared, so close over their heads that it seemed like the hoof-beats of stampeding horses. Ma sat with her arms crossed patiently over her breast, and the other, like a grim Jeremiah, supporting the weight of her heavy head upon the muscular arm she rested upon one knee. The other great hand hung nerveless. So the two women watched the sick woman and the lightning zig-zagging across the square of blue-black sky they could see through the open door.

At the next sharp crash, which seemed to burst in the mountains above the Basin, Ruhama stirred restlessly and opened her eyes.

"How would ye like a bit of gruel made? What have ye had to eat to-day?"

"Tea . . . a little tea. . . ."

Maggie snorted. "Tea! An' her carryin' a baby. . . ."

THE TOWMAN

"Stir up the fire, Maggie. It must 'a gone out. I'll have the gruel made in no time. Where do ye keep the milk, Ruhamy?"

"I don't know. I guess maybe Jamie drank the last. . . ."

"Of course, Peddy couldn't get no more," Maggie scolded, shaking down the ashes, as if she were shaking the life out of the worthless Jim. "With cows right here in your front yard, ye might say!"

"I'll just call across to Lancy for milk an' butter . . . an' some flour, too." Ma stuck her head out to see if it was still raining. "Anything I can do, ma'am?" begged a sad voice above her head.

"Land sakes, Lancy, how ye startled me! Have you been standin' there all the time in the pourin' rain? Ye're soaked to the skin! Ye go right straight home an' change them things. I s'pose it ain't occurred to you I got enough to do 'thout nursin' ye through lung-fever!" she scolded him.

"I never thought. . . . Ye might have wanted somethin'," he apologized.

"No man ever does think. Well, run over now an' tell Paw to bring me some butter an' eggs an' milk . . . an' a little flour."

"I'll bring 'em right back."

"You mind me an' change your duds! Tell Paw to bring a loaf of bread, too. Good thing I baked yestiddy!"

Within an hour, Ruhamy fed and resting, a ludicrous procession moved down the rickety plank . . . Maggie first, marching fiercely along, her arms full of soiled linen; then Asaph with an empty milk-pan, in which were piled dishes; and Ma bringing up the rear.

Casey greeted them from the deck of the Emerald Isle. "The good Samar'tans," he said. "Maggie, I thought ye was goin' to pull out to-night?"

"To-morrer," she said with grim decision in her voice. "I got a washin' to do."

"Well, I guess Peddy won't stop ye none. How's the woman?"

"I heard the banshee las' night . . .," Maggie put in.

"Did ye now?" whispered Casey, removing the pipe from his mouth and staring, awestruck. "She's worse then?"

"In bad shape, but there ain't much we can do, but make her comfortable . . . and wait. I'll send one of the boys for the doctor to-night," said Ma.

"I'll be walkin' up town, myself, an' I'll stop an' tell him."

THE TOWMAN

"Tell him I'll settle with him, Casey. "You know . . . Peddy's credit."

"Credit . . . him? I'll pay the doctor myself. Mind ye, though, I ain't doin' this for Peddy. I'll do anything for his poor wife, but I hope to Gawd he chokes!"

"Maw, I'll go along with Paw," called young Shaemus.

"No, ye won't, son. Ye'll be stayin' home an' buildin' up the fire for your mother, an' ye'll be helpin' her to carry water," she declared. "Ye been away all day fishin' while your poor father worked."

The men were stretched out on the rain-washed deck, Andrew and Lem propped against the side of the cabin, while Lancy and Jean were lolling on the roof. Lancy called out to Mrs. Billings, "There's been a rainbow . . . over there. It's about faded now, but the end of it dipped down into the Slip. The pot of gold was there, I expect . . . now that's faded, too."

"Now, Lancy, I do think that's real poetical, don't you, boys?" said Ma. "Ye changed your clo'es like I good boy, I see. Supper'll be ready in a minute."

CHAPTER XV

So Asaph's cash helped Peddy through the locks at Whitehall; Lem's at Comstocks; and Lancy's at Fort Ann. To disguise what might appear to others as chicken-hearted sentimentality, they argued that it would never do to have him hold up a long line of boats by running his squarely across the canal, as he was perfectly capable of doing, in a pinch. Peddy accepted it all as his due. Mournfully he complained that lock-keepers were a hard-hearted crew . . . take any of 'em from Lake Erie to the Hudson Basin . . . from the Champlain to Troy! Why, they wouldn't even wait for an honest man to collect his hard-earned cash at the end of a trip!

This kept the four boats together, with the Sary-Ann always in the lead, piloted by Asaph. Lancy walked or rode along the tow-path, driving the three-mule hitch like an artist, more by intuition than by rule, and Lem and Andrew guided the second boat, with Jean on hand to relieve them. As Casey had expected, the lemon-squeezer nosed in ahead of him at the second lock, so he must remain in line, whether he liked it or not, and must dig down in his pockets to help the rascal out. Maggie stood at the rudder, a mountain of a woman; and himself on the tow-path, cursing Peddy and commiserating Ruhama by spells.

In the beginning there was some delay, because Peddy had no muleteer, if, in truth, he had really engaged one, which Lem doubted. He had managed before with the help of Jamie, why not now? Finally the services of a tramp were enlisted, although common-sense strongly reasoned against such a step. The fellow was well past his prime, ragged, emaciated and pale, but he seemed to know something about mules, and was willing to slave for his victuals, and wait for further remuneration until the cargo was disposed of, and Peddy could collect his pay. He said he could sleep anywhere, he wasn't particular, so Peddy fixed him up with an old blanket spread on deck. Lem looked at his closely cropped head and hinted at a term served in prison up yonder. . . . Lem jerked his thumb toward Dannemora, but he admitted that the

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poor cuss tended to his own business and didn't seem such a bad sort.

His name was Adam, just Adam, and he kept his weary eyes glued forever upon the distant horizon, as if he expected to meet somebody he knew at the top of the next rise, but when the boat had covered the distance and gained the height smoothly with the passing of the locks, he still gazed ahead, searching through the new vistas opening out before him. "Passin' the locks is our way o' climbin' hills," he remarked once to Jean. "An' after we come to Fort Edward, why, we'll commence goin' down hill. . . ." He swallowed with difficulty and stopped, and that was all he said until Ma sent Jean to call him to dinner. He looked reverently around the cabin before he sat down, and he ate slowly, as if anxious to show that he knew how to act. Over the blackberry-pie, he grew more communicative. "Ma'am, I got a daughter somewheres. She'd like to have me come an' live with her . . . if she only knew where I was at. I wouldn't haf to work no more . . . she'd take care of me an' I'd just set down an' rest . . . if I could only find her," he finished plaintively, and Ma urged him to take another piece of pie.

"I reckon you'll find her some day, Adam, if you wish hard enough."

Nights, when they tied up, as they did occasionally, or when they were waiting to pass the locks, Lancy and Andrew urged Jean to spar with Casey who had been no mean fighter in his own day. On the whole they found the boy an apt pupil, and were constantly amazed by his power. Even Lem, by nature skeptical, vowed it didn't seem as if Bull could withstand such slaughter. Casey was inclined to be more conservative. He agreed that Jean was a great kid . . . but that was just it . . . only a kid after all! Jean took the day as it came . . . fighting or playing or seeing new sights. The life wasn't exactly exciting, not as it had been those first days on the Saguenay . . . nor those later days when he had hidden in corners, hoping to see Diadama stroll along the deck, arm in arm with her young man. After the steam-boat, the sluggish tows seemed as slow as snails, wandering through the forest to swamp and meadow, so close to the banks that one could smell the sweet grass. Sometimes a fox barked back yonder in the copse . . . or a partridge whirred, and Jean's fingers itched for his gun. Past farm-houses, they glided, or paused to buy sweet-corn and fresh eggs and milk, still warm from the cow. Children

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swarmed like flies; and pigs rooted in the mud, in cluttered door-yards. All day long the plod-plod of mules' hoofs, and the swish of the slack line in the water. Jean was glad for any excitement . . . anything to break the monotony . . . passing the locks, where they heard the latest gossip, as the boats rose or fell to the new level; news from the great fair in Philadelphia; wrangles over Tilden and Hayes. No, the canal men couldn't vote, for they were wanderers whose homes were anywhere on the water, but that didn't prevent them from holding decided views concerning the outcome of the coming election. Sometimes they passed other boats, so close that one might lean over and shake hands with a friend standing on deck. "Who's goin' to be elected? Ha?"

It was fun listening to the exchange of banter at the line-barns, where they got their fresh relays of mules.

On the move again, Jean heard the musical cries, "Bridge . . . bridge ahead" . . . "Steady . . . steady-y-y" . . . "Low bridge" . . . "Hey, you . . . barge . . . barge ahead . . .!", of muleteer or pilot. "Hey, Sam, how are ye?" "Fine, how's yerself?"

Sometimes Jean laughed to himself. This little ditch they thought so important and treated like a river! Ah, he could show them rivers! What would they think of the St. Lawrence or the River of the Deep Waters, which cut its way ruthlessly through mountains to gain the sea?

By day the same uninterrupted vault of the heavens above; by night cosy blackness all about, with light streaming from cabin-windows down to the silent water . . . and voices breaking the stillness . . . snatches of a half-forgotten chantey . . . a lullaby . . . a quarrel . . . subdued cursing . . . Jamie's everlasting mouth-organ. Once when a fine, new barge lay alongside, the doleful, dulcet tones of a cabinet-organ, grinding out a hymn-tune made his heart ache with sentiment.

But this quaint picturesqueness did not fool Jean. He knew it was not grand like the Great River, nor mighty in beauty like the lakes. Where was the drama . . . just folks being born, struggling to live and dying like everybody else? He knew that when your time came you died all right, whether on land or water. Death wouldn't wait for you to tie-up. You died right here on the water and were buried hastily in the earth. *Dieu!* Black and stuffy! Was Jim's wife going to get well, he wondered, and threw the reins to young Shaemus, and dashed off up the bank to pick a bunch of Queen Anne's lace for Ruhama. . . .

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Oh, there was not much to see on the canal by day, and less by night, and he came to know that he could not live this life forever. Why, he had learned all there was to learn in twenty-four hours, and now he was all set for the next act . . . and yet they stuck to it, the others, progressing with the tiresome gait of the mules . . . gaining their destination, unloading, retracing their steps, till they were old.

When he was impatient, Andrew and Lancy tried to interest him with tales of the Hudson and Tappan Sea, where ghosts still piloted phantom ships, on dark and stormy nights, and if one listened, one could hear the dip-dip of Rambout Van Dam's oars, as he made his perilous way back toward Spuyten Duyvil. "An they do say ol' man Hudson, himself, ha'nts the North River," Lancy told him. "Aw, ye'll have excitement an' plenty when ye meet up with this here Bull Lampo," Lem would say.

Then Jean would assure them magnanimously that he liked it here. He didn't wish them to think he was ungrateful.

It was below Fort Edward, where the canal meets the Hudson, and thence the artery ceases to ascend and starts descending to Troy, that the curtain rose on the drama of life and death, which Jean took so for granted. Ruhama's time was imminent. . . . Ma said so and Maggie said so, and being women, too, they knew. With characteristic mulishness, Peddy refused to believe it. He argued that it might be days . . . even weeks . . . yes! But at length the truth was forced upon him, as his wife's screams grew sharper and she grew weaker. It caught him unprepared, but not unresourceful, for he simply shifted the responsibility to the two women.

"We'll haf to tie up. That's all there is about it!" Lancy declared to the others. "It's most night anyway. I'll start across country an' see 'f I can't get a doctor."

"Ye will not! A wild goose chase!" snorted Lem. "Me an' Asaph've talked this over, an' we'll try to make Fort Miller, if we can. We can get a doctor there mebbe. Jim should 'a done as the doctor told him, an' tied up to Whitehall till it was all over with . . . always cussin' about how he can't afford it, the shif'less fool! Whip up them mules, Lance."

Asaph sent Jean over to help Casey, and the great lad drove the mules through the gathering gloom, while Casey took Maggie's place at the rudder. Young Shaemus walked by Jean's side, lest he make a misstep and land in the water, but Jean made out well

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enough, by keepin his eyes on the stern-lantern of the lemon-squeezer. "No fear," he thought, "the animals know the way better than me."

"Hold yer course, ye hobo!" Casey was forever growling through his ragged moustache, and Jean couldn't tell whether he meant Peddy or the tramp boat-hoggy.

"Bridge ahead!" came the cry from below and reëchoed along the line.

"Bridge ahead!" Lancy called back. "Bridge a—head . . . steady . . . steady-y-y," from Lem and Andrew. "Bridge ahead, Johnny!" bawled Casey. "An' see to it that tramp hears ye! He ain't answered." It was as if he disclaimed all knowledge of the existence of Peddy and his vicarious driver, for he addressed them indirectly; always in the third person, through another.

"All right . . . Casey. All right . . . I tell him. Bridge ahead, Adam!"

"Sure, I heard him, lad," came the weary answer. "Ol' boat's comin' along, weavin' like a snake. I don't think Peddy's steerin' her atall."

Lancy, in the lead, was driving the beasts furiously. He heard, with alarm, the heaves of the broken-winded rear mule. At this rate they were certain to give out before they could reach the line-barn and a fresh relay. Lem scowled, as his lean jaws worked over his tobacco. Asaph was worried, but said nothing, and kept his eyes riveted on the darkness ahead of them, watching for lights on locks or boats.

"Hell! I knew it. The jenny's gone lame!" Lancy yelled back. "Gotta stop now. Whoa!"

"Steady-y-y . . . ease up, back there. Whoa!" repeated Lem. "What's the matter?"

"That jenny must 'a cast a shoe. Damn her filthy hide!" barked Lancy nervously. "Better tie up an' I'll hoof it for a doctor."

"Ye talk like a blame' fool! How can ye go for a doctor an' it pitch dark, I'd like to know? Ye'd get lost."

"I could head for the lights, couldn't I?"

"There ain't none."

"Hey, lights ahead . . . a-head!" called Asaph sharply. "Look to yer mules! Boat comin' up. H'llo there! Hey! Hel-lo, I say! Who goes there?"

"Hold," yelled Jean, thrilled, but only the echo came back dis-

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mally through the darkness . . . muted . . . "holà . . . holà." . . .

An ugly black shape came steadily on, looming big and dark, beyond her bow-light, which swung like a silent bell. Jean strained his ears to hear its tolling. . . . Nothing . . . nothing, but the breathless silence of the night, and the dread apparition approaching like the ark of Noah . . . like doom.

"Damn ye, whoever ye be! Stop 'er, wun't ye? D'ye want to plough clean through us? Stop 'er, ye murderin' son of a dawg!" cursed Lem. "Stop them mules or ye'll have us in the canal!"

"What boat goes there?" repeated Asaph. "An' have ye a woman on board?"

"Who the hell wants to know?"

"Me . . . Asaph Billin's."

"Ho! Ho! The devil ye say! I want to know . . . ol' Asaph, ye say? Well, listen to me, this boat's the Nellie Z, the fastest an' meanest boat on the canal! Stand aside an' let us pass!"

The Nellie Z! Even Asaph gasped. So *she* had come up? The name burned into their brains like frost-bite. To be sure, they had been expecting her, but not so soon, and here she was sneaking upon them in the dark.

"So 't is you, O'Leary, ye black-hearted spalpeen," sang out the enraged Casey, spoiling for a fight. "I felt a foul wind blow-in' . . ."

"An' I smelt a skunk," said Lem, sniffing the air. "That must be Bull!"

"I'd like to take a swing at ye, myself, for ol' time's sake."

"Ho! Ho! If there ain't Maggie Casey's man," O'Leary retorted. 'T is her wears the britches, I'm told. Haw! Haw!"

"Har . . . har . . . har-r-r!" roared Bull.

"Pretty soon ye'll be laffin' out o' t'other side o' yer foul mouth," threatened Casey.

Jean started forward, but Casey held him back. "Lay off an' stay where ye be! 'T ain't time yet. Don't let him see ye, till we get ready, then give him the surprise of his cussed life," he cautioned, and immediately, with a sharp turn of the rudder, Casey swung his boat diagonally across the canal, blocking all egress.

"O'Leary, yer wife's handy's any woman on the canal at births," Asaph told him. "An' Jim Peddy's Ruhama is took bad. Can't ye forget your hurry an' help her out, just this once?" Asaph tried hard to control himself, yet his voice shook with emotion.

This affected O'Leary not at all. "I'm makin' Whitehall in

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record time. Naw! Naw, I say! So, out of me way, or I'll have Bull throw ye all in the canal!"

"Who will?" yelled Casey. "Take a bigger man'n you, it will! Come over here an' I'll wipe the nose off yer face in the mud, like I useter.

All this bickering! Lancy lost his patience. There was poor Ruhama, lying, suffering just a few feet away from the help which was being refused her. "Mrs. O'Leary, for the love of Gawd, won't ye please come?" he called.

"'T is a trap, sure," muttered O'Leary. "Brigid, stay where ye be!"

"It's no trap, man," Asaph assured him. "Ain't ye got a heart?"

"Asaph Billin's never told a lie to anybody . . . not even to a dirty dawg like you!" Lancy burst out hotly.

"Dirty dawg . . . is it . . .?"

"Tie up an' show yerself a man!" shouted Casey. "Shaemus, stand by them mules!"

"An' what man wants me to? Jim Peddy? Him? He ain't no man. Why, he's only a sneak-thievin' wife-killer. I'll see him in hell first!"

"Shut-up, ye big lout! Ye ain't got no right to talk to me that way . . . an' me with a sick woman daown there below . . . an' like to die, fer all I know," whined Peddy shrilly.

Like a prophet of old, Maggie suddenly appeared on the deck of the lemon-squeezer. "Hush yer mouth, Jim!" she ordered him. "An' you others! I'll take care o' this, myself. Now, Tim O'Leary, ye throw down that there plank mighty quick, an' let Brigid come acrost. If ye don't I'll break loose an' bust yer head open! Yes, yours an' that murtherin' wretch's ye got with ye, too! You hear me. Brigid, get a move on ye! More than once I've helped ye in yer own pain . . . 't isn't likely ye've forgot."

"I'm comin', Maggie. I been gettin' my things together . . . an' see to it there's plenty of hot water. Tim, stand aside an' let me pass," she ordered, elbowing him out of the way. "Jessie, you come help me with this plank, seein' the men-folks on this here boat ain't got the stren'th."

"I'm tellin' ye ye'll rue this day! Brigid, ye'll be sorry fer this!" yelled Tim. "An' Maggie Casey, I'll make ye pay fer it!"

Brigid tugged at the plank, and Jean's strong arms reached from the shadows to push it in place. Bull sprang instantly to his side, and not bothering to take note of the youth's formidable size,

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knocked him to one side and shoved the plank back on deck. Then he signalled to O'Leary to grab the tiller, and with a triumphant bellow which split the silence, whipped up his mules, heading the hulk of the Nellie Z straight for Lancy's slack line. So sudden was the motion of the barge, that Brigid was almost thrown off her feet, and saved herself from a ducking in the canal by grabbing at the capstan.

The mules tugged and sweated, but gained little ground, in spite of Bull's lashing and cursing. In the flickering light of the lanterns, he seemed like a gorilla, squat, powerful, his enormous arms dangling below his knees . . . or again, swinging madly, lashing out at the balking mules.

"Stop him!" shouted Lem. "Somebody, stop him! The damn' fool's rushin' us."

"Go to it," Andrew commanded Jean. "Throw yerself onto him. He ain't ha'f took in how big ye are. Lam the daylights out o' him!"

"Keep away from his paws, kid, an' pummel him plenty when ye get clost. Don't let him close in on ye. Keep dancin' away, an' ye can tire him easy," Casey advised in a hoarse whisper, then he reached out of the darkness and grabbed Bull's forward mule by the bit. "Easy there . . . who-a . . . whoa . . . there," he soothed them.

"Paste him in the stummick, boy!" squealed Peddy.

"Keep yer head, Johnny . . . an' fight hard . . . fight for the sick woman," urged Lancy. "An' don't forget what we told ye."

"I'll hol' the lantern. . . ."

"No, lemme," said Andrew, snatching it up and training the light directly into Bull's eyes. Caught off his guard, harassed by angry voices, and many of them, in the darkness, Bull couldn't tell whom he was fighting, so he stood uncertainly in his tracks, and wove from side to side on his great, flat feet; bewildered, like an animal at bay, facing a sea of hostile faces.

And Jean struck him twice before he quite knew what was happening . . . a powerful left, straight to the chin, and then a smashing right, and a third time . . . that old punch of Jean's which nobody but nature had taught him . . . and which snapped Bull's bullet head back between his shoulder-blades . . . and as the head righted itself through reflex, another to the nose . . . to the eye. Blood gushed from his nose and streamed warmly over his wounded mouth. Already groggy, while Jean was unhurt,

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Bull rushed his opponent wildly, and tried to grab him in his bear-like embrace, but his arms closed on empty air. Then he started slugging, hitting at nothing with powerful blows which spent his strength. Jean jumped aside lightly.

"That's right, Johnny, keep away from his arms!" yelled Casey. "Ah, the lad's swift on his feet! Keep dodgin' . . . ye're tirin' him out."

Jean, still fresh, evaded Bull's punches easily, and at the same time took advantage of his unprotected body to launch a terrific onslaught straight below the heart . . . then, as Bull's arms swung heavily down . . . to the face. O'Leary was beside himself with wrath and amazement, and bawled out unheeded directions. "Grab 'im! Grab 'im, why can't ye? Ye big ox, can't ye get at him? Thought ye was a fighter?" He rushed down from his boat, straight into the battle, but Andrew tripped him, and when he got to his feet, Lem and Lancy held him.

"Ye're goin' to stay right here an' see him take a lickin'!" growled Lem.

Like a blind man, Bull continued to flail the air, once in a while hitting Jean a glancing blow, which the boy shook off, and he laughed, which confused Bull's muddled wits still more. From the deck of the Nellie Z Jean heard a frightened giggle, hysterical, but elated, too. It was music to his ears and spurred him on to greater deeds. Bull sobbed painfully through swollen lips and he choked on the sickish taste of his own gore. This beating was a new experience and not at all to his liking. This ignominy had never happened to him before . . . it was not as he had planned it. Why, gosh darn, if ol' Asaph wasn't a squint-eyed fox! He'd gone an' hired himself a Texas steer an' trained him just to beat up Bull . . . the champeen boat-hoggy, champeen bouncer of the canal!

"See what ye done! Goin' to let a lad lick ye?" cried O'Leary helplessly. "Leggo my arm, will ye, boys? Ye're breakin' it! Ah, ye bull-headed scamp, think I keep ye for yer beauty? 'T is like takin' money from a corpse, it is! Ain't ye got no guts?"

Close to Jean's elbow, a soft voice murmured, "It's enough . . . please . . . it's enough. Can't ye see he's hurt . . . bad?" But Jean worked the faster, buzzing around his victim like a tantalizing insect, but smashing him like a sledge-hammer; terrific blows which made the great oaf's head spin, and his huge, ape-like body one large ache. Bull groaned and sank to his knees.

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"Smash 'im one on the jaw," dictated Casey.

"Kick 'im in the belly," yelled Peddy, dancing up and down on the deck of the lemon-squeezer.

"No . . . don't do that. He can't hurt anybody now . . . can't ye see?" begged the small voice, so frail that Jean thought it was his own conscience importuning him.

He stopped and turned around, and there between the lanterns, held high by excited hands, was a slim shape, fragile as a moon-beam, and her delicate face as pale. "Hello, who are you?" asked Jean, dropping his arms to his sides. "Where you come from?"

"Oh . . . I'm just Jessie . . . I live here with them," and she jerked her head toward the barge.

"Ye get back up there on that boat an' stay there, if ye know what's good for ye! None o' yer gallivantin'!" And the girl disappeared as suddenly as she had come.

"Hey, you . . . kick 'im in the belly!" shrieked Peddy again, and Jamie sent his falsetto echo, trailing his father's shout.

"Ye can't kick a man that's down," argued Adam sadly, and he shivered.

"Naw, ye gotta fight clean," said Shaemus, shoving Jamie out of his way.

Bull tried to rise, but with an exhalation of breath which sounded like a sigh of blessed relief, he ceased suddenly to sway on his drunken knees. His body sought the ground and he clung tiredly to the bosom of Mother Earth.

"We'd oughter throw him in the canal, an' let him wake up ten feet under in the stinkin' slime," snarled Lem, letting go of Tim. "An' now, my fine feller, d'ye want me to knock you out, too?" he invited the Irishman, hitching up his braces.

"Aw . . . you win," admitted Tim disconsolately, walking off.

"An' you pay the comp'ny for a fine team o' mules! D'ye hear that?"

"An' now will ye hark to me, ye crazy, fightin' fools? I'll thank ye all to shut yer mouths an' set that there plank in place an' hasten Brigid O'Leary over here," Maggie commanded frigidly, and all hands hurried to obey. "Standin' around fightin' when a poor woman's sick to death! Wish to Gawd ev'ry mother's son o' ye had to bear a child . . . I do! Then things'd be diff'runt," she scolded, as Brigid marched majestically over the plank, which stretched from deck to deck. "An' now I'll ask ye kindly to shut yer faces, an' keep quiet! An' if ye don't . . . Johnny, I ain't

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sayin' ye didn't put up a good fight, but if ye hadn't made 'im bite the dirt, I'd 'a put 'im under the sod with my belayin'-pin," and so saying, she threw a chunk of stove-wood so viciously into the water that the tremendous splash hit Tim full in the face, and then she strode after Brigid down the cabin steps.

CHAPTER XVI

THROUGHOUT the night the women watched and labored, and the men waited. Andrew offered to help Tim carry the unconscious Bull to his bunk, but Jean waved him aside and shouldered the man, like a trussed-sheep, and bore him below, where he threw him on the sofa. "Hey, you, Jessie, get a move on an' bring us some hot water!" Tim shouted, without turning his head, and presently the girl appeared with a basin of water. She faltered a brief moment, almost ill at the sight of Bull's battered face.

"Come . . . wipe it off!" Tim ordered her, lighting his pipe, and she knelt down immediately, and wringing out her rag, bathed the twitching flesh. Her hair, blue-black as a pool at night, fell in a cloud about her shoulders, and the frame of it made her olive skin the more pallid. Jean stared at her, fascinated. Like magic . . . under the very magic of her touch . . . Bull seemed to revive. Hot water and arnica for his bruises, and whiskey down his throat. He grunted gratefully, then turned over and slept.

Jean glanced at Tim, smoking there so complacently, as if nothing had happened. He didn't seem at all put out, now that the combat was over. Victory or defeat, it was all the same to Tim . . . all in a busy day's work . . . and to-morrow they would have to hurry a little faster because a new life had held them up. Tim jerked his thumb toward a chair, and Jean sat down, quite as if he were not an enemy, but an invited guest. Jessie moved out of her corner, where she stood, hesitating, as if waiting for Tim's approval, before she pulled out a hassock and squatted upon it, trying the while to drag down her short skirts and cover up her bare legs. The legs were slender . . . too thin, Jean thought. Too bad! Ma Billings could feed her plenty!

The Nellie Z was a two-cabin boat, snugly fitted out. Jean felt at home on her at once. He was looking about him with interest, when the girl reached out her hand and touched his scarred knuckles, made a sympathetic *moue*, and rushed out for more hot water. Jean held out his great fists submissively, while she dabbed at them with a bit of wet rag. Her hands were little,

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but strong and brown, and without the lily-whiteness of Diadama's; and her eyes were gray, instead of black, as he had first thought. Ah, she was so small, he could take her in his two hands and bend her . . . ! Then a wave of tenderness swept over him, and he felt somehow that she needed his protection, that he must get her away from Tim and the spell of the Nellie Z.

Tim was watching him narrowly. "I s'pose ye plan to stay with the ol' man . . . with Billin's, ha?" he asked suddenly. "Ye wouldn't think of changin', would ye, now?"

"Me? I don' know. I like it fine . . . sure, but some day I go off on a big boat. I like the river . . . and the sea. . . ."

Tim nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, I useter think so, too, but it ain't so safe . . . not with wimmen folks around, it ain't . . . an' I'm saddled with 'em. Besides I get to see the river, when I get to Albany . . . an' later when winter comes, I foller the river to the sea. . . . Oh, there's plenty o' water! I just thought if ye're thinkin' o' changin', why, I could take ye on," and with that he sauntered up the steps and out on deck. "The moon's comin' up . . . what's left of it," he called down to them. "Ye better come up where I can watch ye."

"Yes, Uncle," answered Jessie meekly.

"An' no sparkin', mind! Jessie's too young to know about such things."

"No, Uncle," and Jessie threw a red and white knitted shawl over her calico-clad shoulders and walked out beside Jean.

"We sit here mebbe," suggested the boy, and without waiting for her to answer, lifted her to the roof of the cabin. Light as a feather, she was . . . lighter even than 'tite Marie at home. Such a wee thing, but so sweet! They sat there, soberly apart, and Tim leaned against the tiller; and the three of them surveyed the moon, a ragged jade, riding the clouds dizzily. John was happy and he hoped that Jessie was happy, too.

Presently the two boys, Shaemus and Jamie, came along, strolling aimlessly. Without waiting for a bidding, Jamie scrambled up on the deck of the Nellie Z, and joined Jean and Jessie. "Here they be! Shaemis. . . . Here they be!" but Shaemus hung back, kicking at the gravel of the tow-path. Endeavoring to show her sympathy, Jessie extended her hand tentatively toward Peddy's boy, but he shied away, like a half-wild colt, and stood sullenly at a distance. His pinched nose wrinkled nervously, like the snout of a mouse, scenting cheese.

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"O—O—oo. . . ."

"I am wonderin' how your Ma is?" Jessie asked.

"Her? She ain't my Maw! She's only my step. My Maw, she was drowned, which Paw says was a darn sight cheaper. Us losin' all this time! This 'un don't count. . . ."

"Hush! Please don't . . . ye mustn't talk like that!" protested Jessie.

"Hush yer noise, boy," ordered Tim. "Have respec' for the dyin'. And his Maw ain't no gypsy wench neither," he grumbled savagely, under his breath. "If she was, I'd say let 'er die, an' good riddance! The world's better off with some folks dead."

As if she had heard his mutterings, Jessie murmured apologetically, "Jamie, Mothers are diff'runt . . . somehow. You see, I know. . . . My Mother's dead. . . ."

"Dead, is she? Sold herself to the first tin-peddler come along . . . an' Tom in his cups an' not sensin', ye might say. . . . That she did!" breathed Tim through his ragged moustache.

Jessie refused to look at him, and if she heard, she made no sign. Jean sensed her despair, without half comprehending. He felt Jamie was somehow responsible. "*Toi!*" he snapped, grabbing the boy's skinny wrist.

"Ou—ouch!" wailed Jamie. "Ye big, ol' ox! Paw! Hey, Paw, make 'im leave me be!" But everybody was too busy to pay him the slightest attention, and Shaemus scoffed, "Cry baby!"

Jean dropped his arm good-naturedly and gave him a friendly push, receiving a smart kick in the shins for his pains. The child slipped away and down the gang-plank, shouting his gibes after him, as he gained a safe distance, "Big ox! Big ox! Ain't naw-thin' but a big ox . . . ye Frenchy!" Finally Shaemus cuffed his ears from sheer exasperation, and they went scuffling down the tow-path.

Over in the cabin of the Sary Ann the men had set up a game of poker. They played half-heartedly, speaking in undertones. Lancy refused to join them, and sat on the deck of the second boat, and waited. After a while Tim strolled along, clearing his throat as he approached Lancy, trying to get up courage to speak. At length he launched forth, "Say, I was plumb sorry to hear that young feller was drowned . . . along with a fine team o' mules. 'T was dark, as ye know, an' Bull, he said he warned 'im. . . ."

"O . . . oooo. . . ."

Lancy's face hardened. "I s'pose ye expect me to say, 'Why,

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Tim, it's quite all right, an' thank ye kindly.' Not by a damn' sight! I notice ye didn't turn back to help us fish 'im out! Ye kept right on goin'. I s'pose ye figgered one boat-hoggy, more nor less, don't make much diff'rance!"

"I tell ye I didn't know for certain till we reached Schuylerville. Bull tol' me 't was a accident. He said ye was sure to fish 'im out."

"An', o' course, ye believed him! Accident! Bull's a killer, an' ye know it! Reckon that's what ye hired him for, ain't it? An' let me tell ye, it ain't helped yer repitation none on the canal!"

"Reckon Bull's had his lesson now," O'Leary responded gloomily, still trying to be friendly.

"Reckon if Johnny'd killed him, 't would 'a been what he deserved. Mebbe you've had a lesson, too, gettin' so gol' durned high-handed!"

"I gotta hustle, ain't I, an' make money quick? Ain't I got an orphan on my hands to bring up an' get married off?"

"Well, makin' money by killin' folks is murder, an' it'll do ye no good, in the long run. Did ye ever try explainin' yer fine reasons to that poor lad's Maw . . . that widder-woman down to Fort Ann? Don't ye talk to me! Ye ain't reformed none . . . ye're just licked, that's all, an' ye're tryin' to make the best of a bad fix. Why, Asaph could 'a put ye both in Dannemora, if he'd took a notion to, but that wouldn't bring back the kid. Well, it took a kid to lick Bull in the end . . . an' he licked 'im pretty!"

"I tell ye 't was a accident, an' I'll stick to my story! Thought ye big fools was smart enough to fish 'im out of the ditch! Aw, have it yer own way!" and Tim walked off.

Through the windows of the cabin came the sound of Andrew's voice, "No, ye don't, Lem, not this time. I'll trouble ye for them chips . . . with four of a kind. . . ."

"I might 'a knowed it . . . no luck at all! Oughter knowed better than play with a red-headed Scotchman."

"He's ha'f Irish. That's why he beat ye," laughed Casey raucously.

"Bein' Irish ain't gettin' you nothin'."

"Sure, I know . . . lucky at love, ye know . . .," and Casey let out a loud guffaw, which was immediately hushed by Asaph.

"O—O—oo . . ." came the muffled cry.

Lancy frowned and turned his gaze back toward the lights burning in the cabin of the lemon-squeezer. Why didn't they do something to hurry things along? Presently he saw Peddy and his boy

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come out and roll themselves up in blankets on deck. Then the tramp-driver passed as silently as a shadow, his feet seeming scarcely to touch the ground. Once he dislodged a stone, which fell into the water with a hushed splash. "Sure walks soft . . . pussy-footin', kind of . . . I wonder . . . ? Guess his shoes is all wore out. Wonder where he did come from?" Lancy shifted his position a bit, in order to keep the other in sight, and eased his sleeping foot to the floor. "Come on up here, Adam, if ye want to," he called out.

"Wonder what time it's gettin' to be?" Adam asked.

Lancy drew forth his nickel-plated watch and held it toward the ship's lantern. "Ha'-past one. Gawd! I thought 't was mos' mornin'."

"She won't live," said Adam morosely. "An' then I won't have no job . . . nor no place to go. I'll be wanderin' again."

"Ye're a strange bugger, ain't ye? Why, of course, she'll live! D'ye think Ma an' Maggie an' Brigid O'Leary 's goin' to let her die?"

"I know . . . they'll do all they can, but she can't live. She can't, an' I'm thinkin' it'll be kind of nice for her to rest. Sometimes I wish my time'd come, an' I could rest. I often wish dyin' was as easy as wishin'. I'd like to change places with her . . . only I got a daughter somewheres an' she'll be lookin' for me. . . ."

"Sure, Adam, ye don't want to die . . . yet," Lancy spoke with difficulty over the lump in his throat. "Don't ye fret none about havin' no place to go . . . in case . . . in case . . . somethin' happens. I guess we can fix ye up somehow." He swallowed loudly and sniffed. Ass! He felt like bawling and he couldn't tell whether he was more sorry for Ruhama or for Adam. Afraid of death? Not he . . . not after all the dying he had seen in Virginia during Grant's 'hammerin' campaign,' from the Wilderness to Richmond. Moans of dying men, he would never forget; the stench of the dead; flies swarming over bloated carcasses of horses.

"Oh, I ain't worryin' none. I stopped that long ago, for it don't do no good. I just plan to keep my eyes on to-morrer," Adam sighed.

Lancy jumped, for he had quite forgotten the other's existence. "Eh? Oh . . . that's the way to look at it . . . sure! It don't do no good. There's blankets down there, Adam. Why don't ye lay

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down a spell? I'll watch out for things an' call ye, if a tow comes through."

Lancy stayed there until the blue overhead became darker, then luminous, then green, and the stars faded. The first pink glow illumined the violet of the east. He yawned and stretched . . . cautiously, and shivered in the thick mists, rising like smoke from the canal. The five boats slowly emerged from the gloom, and other objects gradually took form. The bank rose, steep and wooded, on one side; on the other, beyond the tow-path, lay a narrow meadow, with its tall spikes of timothy grass, and a farmhouse in the distance. "I could 'a got help over there," he thought, as he yawned again and drew his right leg carefully over the left. He nursed his knee, for the old bullet-wound twinged. "We're in for a spell o' bad weather," he remarked to himself, rubbing his leg vigorously. "Them Reb bullets sure had a kick in 'em!"

All at once he realized that activities on board the lemon-squeezer had ceased. The lights went out and there was an ominous silence. Lancy recalled that for some time he had not heard the low moaning, nor the occasional sharp cries, which had pierced the silence of the night. He was scared. That wasn't the way men died! Almost in answer to his unspoken question, the tramp's head appeared through the cabin-door. "She won't live," he said, as if completing his conversation of some hours ago. And now Lancy did not trouble to dispute him.

Adam seated himself beside Lancy on the cabin-roof, and Lancy noticed the pitiful thinness of his body, shivering beneath the old coat. "Cold?" he asked solicitously.

"Kind o'. It's ague I got, ye see . . . or mebbe a touch o' malarly. I'm feelin' better though, an' the fever ain't so bad now. . . ."

Lancy pulled a bottle out of his pocket. "Here, take a swig o' this. It'll warm yer vitals."

"Thanks," and he took the bottle and raised it to his lips, but drank sparingly.

"Go on . . . take some more."

"No . . . that's enough. I seen the time when I couldn't get none . . . times when I wanted a little to make me forget. . . . There's the woman," he remarked, jerking his thumb toward Peddy's boat.

Wearily Maggie climbed up the steps and stood for a moment, gazing toward the east.

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Lancy opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again, for he knew it was useless.

She caught sight of him. "Yeah, it's all over, Lance . . . an' I must say I'm glad," she said quietly. "She suffered awful. . . ."

"Dead?"

"Both of 'em."

"Gawd! It don't seem right," he murmured sadly.

"Oh, Lance, I reckon it is, though. I've known it ever since I heard the banshee that other night. . . ."

"But, Maggie, she ain't had no life at all hardly . . . no real fun, ye might say. . . ."

"An' d'ye think she would ever have fun livin' here with Peddy?" demanded Maggie tersely. "Layin' there, day after day, starvin' her soul for a little attention . . . sick an' lonesome . . . on this ol' ditch! It's been hell for her! Get up, ye loafer . . . get up," she said, prodding the sleeping Peddy with her boot, and none too gently. "Get up . . . an' show some in'trest. Yer wife's dead." She pushed her hair back from her forehead. "I'm dog-tired. . . . Call the men, Lancy, an' Mis' Billin's said to stir up the fire an' put the kittle on. We'll have to be pullin' out soon's we can. 'Tis hot weather an' we won't be able to make Schuyler-ville any too soon with the *reemains*, I'm thinkin'."

Lancy shuddered and started along the path toward the Sary-Ann.

Under Maggie's stern gaze, Peddy unrolled himself from his blanket and shook the boy by his side. "C'mon, git up!" He stretched his arms over his head and yawned. "Well, here's another woman o' mine has up an' died on me," he remarked, strutting down the tow-path in Lancy's direction. "Gee, Lance, I'm hungry!"

Lancy did not turn around. "I'll kill him, if I do!" he thought. Instead he went down into Ma's cabin, roused the dozing men and shook down the fire.

"Better put the kittle on," Tim called to Jessie, whose head had fallen against Jean's shoulder. "Yer a'nt'll be comin' back, wore-out an' hungry. Ye'll have to help me to-day, I expect, 'cause Bull's so bunged-up."

Jessie rubbed her eyes and jumped to obey. She turned back to wave her hand to Jean, as she disappeared into the cabin. He slid down from his perch, stretched, nodded to Tim, and sauntered off toward the Sary-Ann.

CHAPTER XVII

"ASHES to ashes . . . dust to dust," the preacher intoned, as he sifted a handful of earth upon the bosom of Ruhama's coffin, and to the humble folk gathered around, paying their last respects, the words seemed strangely new. "The Lord giveth and he taketh away. . . ." Then slowly the pastor turned his eyes toward the range of hills in the east, with Bald looming in the distance. "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills . . . whence cometh my help. . . ." Jean was watching with interest, this ceremony shorn of all the extravagances of ritual, and now he saw a wanton breeze lift the stiff, gray hair above the preacher's head, and part the thin edges of his beard. He smiled. His ears caught the words, "hills", and he recalled the stark magnificence of the Laurentides, and his eyes smarted.

"Hills," Adam repeated to himself, and shivered. Hills . . . yes, . . . and stone walls and iron bars made to keep men in . . . to herd them in like beasts . . . to destroy their souls! He gasped softly, and Ma Billings glanced at him. "It's ague I got, Ma'am, or mebbe malarý," he whispered to her, and his face grew more pinched.

"I got some good powders that'll do ye a lot o' good, Adam," she whispered back.

Lancy was watching the shadows of clouds chasing each other across the grass, and his keen nostrils quivered before the scent of pine and hemlock in the air. "Peace," he thought. "Peace, at last," and he tried hard to bring back the vision of Ruhama's face, but try as he would, he could remember only the rosy-cheeked girl in her father's home. Where was the face of the care-worn woman? He had known the girl, but he had lost the woman, so he sighed not too sadly, and gave up trying. Worthless Peddy had lost her, too. Give thanks for that! It was better so. . . . "Hills . . . I will lift mine eyes unto the hills . . .," and he saw again the contours of the Blue Ridge mountains, and beyond . . . the Wilderness, as if it were but yesterday, and the old 69th was fighting its way through exploding hell to Richmond.

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The preacher pronounced the benediction and they filed away. "There ain't no call to keep on helpin' Peddy now, is there?" Lancy asked Lem, as they climbed into the spring-wagon which was to take them back to the canal.

Lem paused for a while, waiting for the horses to fall into their monotonous jog. Through a fog of thought, he saw the dusty roan and bay flicking flies from their lean rumps, before he turned to face Lancy. "No, I reckon there ain't no need," he admitted. "But, I'm tellin' ye, I'd be inclined to stick close to Peddy till he gets his pay f'm the comp'ny, and then I'd get my money back, if I was you. He'd oughter pay for his own wife's buryin', seems like. . . . Gawd knows he didn't have to pay for the other. . . ."

"I don't want 'im to pay me! I won't touch a cent Jim Peddy gives me! I don't want his money . . . only to see his behind disappearin' in the distance."

"That ain't no way to hurt Peddy . . . lettin' him off that easy."

"I ain't tryin' to hurt him. I want to forget him. I done what little I done for Ruhama an' her folks . . . not for him, by a durn sight! I won't take a cent an' I hope he rots in his stinkin' boat!"

"I reckon he will. Most anything would in that tub. It sure needs caulkin' an' paintin' bad. I sometimes wonder if ye was to put her in dry-dock an' fix her up good, would she be such a loss after all?"

"What? That ol' lemon-squeezer? Ye must be crazy!"

"Oh, I was jest wonderin'. Yep, I'm inclined to think I'd stick around Peddy till he gets his gold, an' then collect my share . . . if I was you."

"I tell ye I don't want none of it!" thundered Lancy, and as the carriage came to a halt by the docks, he jumped out and strode away.

"He's all upshot by her dyin'," Lem explained to Andrew, who had remained behind to watch the boats.

About supper-time, Peddy and his boy came aboard, so Ma asked them to stay to supper. Lancy got up from his place. "Let 'em sit here," he offered. "I'll wait an' eat with you. I got something else to do now."

"Why, no, Lance, we'll move along. You set still. . . ."

"Let him wait an' eat with me, Pa. I'd like comp'ny to-night," said Ma.

"Me, too. I wait," declared Jean.

"You two boys go up on deck. I'll call ye when I'm ready."

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"Lance, he ain't very sociable," complained Peddy. "I've tried to talk to him sev'ral times to-day an' he ain't taken the trouble to answer me civil."

"It's his leg botherin' him again," said Asaph, scowling at Lem, who was about to speak.

"I s'pose the Nellie Z, she's in Whitehall now . . . loadin'?" Jean inquired of Lancy.

"I guess so, Johnny. Ye sure beat that Bull up some . . . had him eatin' out o' your hands when they left."

"Oh, him . . . easy! I think of Jessie . . . so little an' pretty."

"Oh, so it's the kid, is it? Ha? What d'ye want of her, I'd like to know?"

"Mebbe marry her sometime."

"Marry? Well, that's serious business . . . but, then if ye don't marry when ye feel the inclination, why somebody else is liable to come along an' get ahead of ye. Well, Jessie's a nice kid, even if she is related to Tim. He's a hard nut to crack."

"I like the girl."

"Tim's been good to her, in his way. Never quite forgive his brother for taking up with that gypsy woman that useter hang around Alb'ny, though. A wild, black vixen, she was, too, bold as brass, but how she could dance! Why, she'd fair make a man's heart jump out of his body! An' young Tom O'Leary . . . he was a handsome cuss . . . fell for her, hook, line an' sinker. He'd watch her dance, there in the firelight . . . with some buck-gypsy playin' wild on the fiddle . . . then the two of 'em would dance . . . an' dance . . . an' wouldn't know anybody else was around. When Tom's father's barges come to Whitehall, why the woman folloed 'em . . . and on the sly they seen a lot of each other. Folloed him to Whitehall the first chance she got, the hussy!

"It was fall, an' they was havin' some kind o' celebration . . . field day or something. I know the Torrent Hose Comp'ny had a brand new cart an' was itchin' to show it off. Ever see one? Well, ye'll have to. Well, it seems the Comp'ny was shy a man an' Tom up an' offered to help 'em out. I can see 'em dashin' down Canal Street in their white tights; then playing their jet right smart, with Tom O'Leary helpin' at the pump . . . when all of a sudden, he looked around an' caught sight o' this gypsy woman, just starin' at him with them black eyes. Tom lost his head, jumped over the fence an' left 'em flat. And Sandy Hook won . . . an' was Whitehall mad? They cussed him out plenty.

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I can shut my eyes an' see it all . . . the sun shinin' on the ol' ditch an' the blue sky above Skene . . . an' them fine fellers racin' down the street, ahead of the new cart.

"Well, that night Tom stowed her away in one of his Pa's boats . . . the old man owned a string o' three. Tom made out like they was married by the priest, but nobody ever thought they was. . . . Hey, I'm ramblin' on! I don't b'lieve ye heard a word I been sayin'. I keep forgettin' ye're French. Seems like ye understand more'n ye do. Well, anyways, to finish my story, she left him cold in a few years . . . after this kid was born. Went off with the first buck-gypsy she caught sight of, she did, an' 't want long before they found Tom's body in the canal. Tim an' his wife took the kid an' raised her. Sometimes I think they're kind o' strict with her, but I guess they don't want her to turn out like her Ma."

Down in the cabin Peddy and Jamie ate ravenously, as if they were intent upon stoking up for some time to come. Not until they reached the third helping of pie, did Peddy pause to break his silence. "I got a sister to Glens Falls, I'd like to see. I'd like to meet up with my own folks again," he began mournfully, and Lem stiffened in his chair. "Her man 's got a good business . . . grain. I could visit her naow, if I wa'n't so tied daown with the durned boat I got on my hands . . . an' me losin' money an' havin' such expenses right along. Mebbe I could settle daown there an' rest for a spell . . . sort of locate on land, I'd like to. I mean if 't want for the gol' durned ol' boat."

Andrew pushed back his chair and left.

"Have ye heard from your sister lately?" asked Ma skeptically.

"No, I ain't, but I know she must be there somewheres. The grain business'd oughter be fair. Asaph, ye don't think o' buyin' another boat, do ye? Ye ain't in the market, so to speak?"

"No, I ain't never considered a lemon-squeezer none, Peddy. No, I reckon we ain't real int'rested."

"Well, I don't know what I'm goin' to do. Here I got me a boy to bring up, an' the Lord knows the canal ain't no fit place for him . . . along with these here cheap Irish an' Canucks! . . . an' he needs schoolin'."

"He needs a lickin'," grumbled Lem.

"Reckon the canal's used me pretty mean, an' I'm sick to death of it. It'll prob'ly kill me 'fore it gets through with me. I'd sell out cheap . . . cargo an' all, if I could."

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"The cargo ain't rightly yourn to sell, Jim," objected Lem. "Ye're still owin' them people back there, that trusts ye to carry it through. . . ."

"Ye could settle up with them as good as me, if ye took the boat."

"Your boat ain't been kept up. It's in bad shape, an' ye ain't never been able to carry grain on her . . . nor potatoes, as she is. There's a mortgage, too?"

"Well . . . I ain't had the money to put in repairs, what with all the sickness I've had with my two wimmen, an' all. Reckon I'll be tied down all my life . . . an' when I was just beginnin' to think p'raps. . . ."

"What d'ye think, Lem?" asked Asaph. "Interested?"

"I can't afford to keep Adam . . . an' I can't get along 'thout him," Peddy grumbled.

"Ye hired him for the trip. Ye'll have to see him through, I reckon. It wouldn't hardly be fair . . . an' him not well," pleaded Ma.

Peddy glanced at her and took hope. "I don't know where the money's comin' from . . . even for food. . . ."

"Ye might leave cards an' drink be, then," suggested Lem shortly. "I figger we might use the ol' tub, Asaph, but it ain't worth much," he cautioned.

"Well, gimme an offer . . . anythin'! All's I want is a fair price."

"Well, you men go along an' let Lancy and Johnny an' me have our supper. Finish your tradin' outside," said Ma, shooin' them out.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

"It's Casey. What's he want?"

"Hey, come on up!" yelled Lancy. "Come on . . . Casey's goin'!"

All hands hurried out.

"We're goin' along," said Maggie.

"We want to make the locks 'fore dark," explained Casey.

"Ye'll prob'ly ketch up to us. Good-bye, Mis' Billin's . . . good-bye, all. . . ."

"Good-bye, Maggie. I'll never forget all ye done. . . ."

"Nor me . . . you. . . ."

Billings' crew waved the Emerald Isle out of sight, and stood watching her, as she crawled off toward the sunset, rounding the

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bend in the canal . . . Maggie at the rudder, and Casey and Shaemus trudging along the tow-path, guiding the mules.

"It'll seem lonesome without 'em," said Ma sadly. "We've lived a life-time since we first caught sight of Maggie's boat the other mornin'."

"Maggie's the best skipper on the ditch," remarked Lem.

"Casey was pretty decent to me in my trouble . . . in spite of all his meanness before," Peddy admitted reluctantly.

"Casey's one of the world's best!" declared Lancy hotly.

"Well, let's get down to business," suggested Lem. "Now I'll tell ye what I think is a fair figger for your ol' tub, Peddy. . . ."

"I don't want to interfere none in your business, but I want ye should understand one thing . . . if you decide to take his boat, Adam's to come with it!" said Ma.

"Ye're right, Sary; Adam stays with the boat."

Along toward mid-afternoon of the following day, a lawyer having been consulted, papers recorded and money having changed hands, the Billings family waved farewell to Peddy and his son, who, with a bulging carpet-bag in hand and arms full of bundles, were last seen trudging over the dusty road in the direction of the railroad tracks. Jamie and his father were equally elated . . . they were going to have their first ride on the cars.

"I wonder if he'll ever reach Glens Falls?" asked Ma.

"Who cares?" snapped Lancy, and started whistling blithely, as he had not whistled since Ruhama's death.

"I'll bet he ain't got no sister there . . . mebbe no sister at all," sneered Lem.

"Well, anyhow, we ain't lost nothin', an' we've rid the canal of Jim Peddy. I'm glad we got the boat. She'll stand us in pretty good next fall when we start loadin' potaters. She'll like's not most pay for herself in a busy season."

"We gotta get her fixed up first."

"Yeah. While we're unloadin' in Alb'ny, Lance and Adam can caulk her an' paint her up, I'm figgerin'."

"Let's get goin', Lem. What say?"

"Sure, Asaph. C'mon, Lance, drive 'em along! Adam, you take the rudder of the lemon-squeezer, an' Jean, he can tend to the mules awhile. Where's Andy?"

"Comin'. Been lookin' for my tobaccer. Some skunk's took it. It's that Jim Peddy . . . hope he swallows it an' chokes! All set, Lem! Giddap!"

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Jean sat astride the lead-mule and glanced back at the lemon-squeezer, weaving snakily on. He thought of her fondly as his first command, for Adam was so meek and old, he didn't count. A funny, old tub, you bet, but he was proud of her!

CHAPTER XVIII

GOLDEN days of autumn followed one another into early twilight . . . days of wind-madness. Mists hovered over river and canal, violet, steely or black, according to the moods of nature. Yellow leaves filtered through yellow haze, drifting like chimerical snow, and dark arms of conifers, crowning Skene Mountain, swayed in extraordinary symmetry. Jean threw up his arms in ecstasy and shouted for joy, and the mountains sent back their defiance. He swung rapidly toward the dawn, up along the meandrine narrows of East Bay. Beneath the scowling brow of Rattlesnake, he passed, hunting for his favorite swimming-hole, which he had discovered on their last trip up. He must get there quickly, take his dip and rush back in time for breakfast, or Lem would be shouting for him.

Sweat wet his pink shirt in dark streaks, and with an impatient gesture, he stopped long enough to strip it off, then strode on, bare to the waist. The wind purling over his bronzed flesh, dried the moisture, and Jean laughed, for it tickled.

Presently he came to the rustic foot-bridge and turned sharply to the right, sliding down the bank to the water, overgrown grass and weeds striking his ankles wetly. He flung his arm over a branch in his pathway, which propelled him like a crane over the gnarled roots. Then he poised like a bird before its flight. There, marring the placid calm of his pool, was a water nymph . . . some young Narcissa . . . for so she seemed, a spirit from the remote past. She was sitting in the shallow water and bending forward from her waist to watch her slender, green reflection in the murky depths. Ripples, like folds of crepe, distorted the shadowy ivory of her torso. Slowly she raised one slender arm and silver drops showered into the water, stirring to life small, concentric rhythms. Then she bent forward, drooping, breast to breast, shoulder to shoulder, face to face, with her reflection; and pushing herself into deeper water, swam lazily toward the opposite bank.

At this moment a stone beneath Jean's feet became dislodged

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and tumbled, bumping over the rocks into the pool. Startled, the girl turned around and saw him for the first time.

"Hi, Jessie . . . Jessie . . . *c'est moi* . . . me, Jessie! Don't be 'fraid!"

"You . . . where did you come from, you big giant? What are you doing here? You scared me! I thought you was one of them fellows from the yard that yelled to me when I came by. Go 'way!" And she moved swiftly toward the blacker water beneath the bridge.

"Deep there. Watch out," he warned her. "Wait . . . I come!"

"No, you mustn't . . . No!"

"But, yes, why not?"

"My uncle . . . he warned me. He says I can't see you. He says I'm my mother's own daughter an' that's like bein' a ver'table limb o' Satan. He says I'm too young, an' . . . an' A'ntie says no knowin' what'll happen. I don't. . . . Stay where ye are till I get my clo'es on an' go home."

"They're here . . . your clo'es."

"Well, then, bring 'em to me, please. Please bring 'em, Jean, an' leave 'em by the bridge, an' go back. Ye gotta hide behind the tree till I get 'em on. Promise! My uncle'll be mad!"

"Why? You like me before . . .!"

"It ain't that. I do like you, but my A'nt told me about Mama. She's not dead like I thought. She's a bad woman, and she run off with another man, because she wanted him . . . before Papa died. That's an awful thing to do. It's not bein' faithful unto death, she says. A'ntie says I must watch out an' guard against the sin I was born with, an' Mama's not dead, only wicked an' livin' in sin. . . ."

"Yes . . . dead. . . ."

"No, they say. . . ."

"How they know? They see her? No! She go away long ago an' ye never see her. She's dead . . . to you. *Hein?*"

"Well, maybe. Maybe that's right. She might have died, sorrowing over what she had done, I s'pose. But they said . . . Jean, please put my clo'es by the bridge an' go away where ye can't see."

"I won't hurt ye."

"Please."

"*Eh bien*, I put 'em there, then go back an' swim. You dress an' wait by the bridge an' we go back toget'er. See?"

"I'm afraid."

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"Do not be 'fraid . . . no. I am wit' you."

He hung the calico dress and chemise over a young maple beside the bridge, and placed the coarse, small shoes beneath. How little they were! He moved them tenderly this way and that, settling them finally to his satisfaction. He shook the tree and scarlet leaves spilled over them. . . .

"Hurry! I'm cold."

"Sure," and with a final caress he dashed back again. "All right," he called from behind his tree, then rapidly stripped himself and walked into the water, till it rose to his waist, rolled leisurely over on his side and swam with easy strokes.

"Don't come this way . . . not yet," the girl called anxiously.

Why did she care if he saw? He and his sisters had bathed together always. They romped like porpoises in the cold waters of the lake, sleek, bare bodies arching above, then below the green surface of the water. Cautiously he glanced in her direction, just in time to see her emerge, all dripping, and skip up the bank.

"You looked!" she screamed. "It's not fair," then she stumbled, stopped a moment to nurse her toe, and hopped on one foot behind the tree.

Jean continued to paddle about in his diminutive pond. Nothing but a mud-hole, he thought, with a divine patch of blue shining through the red-gold arch of the trees above his head. Ah, one day he would show Jessie the great lake at home . . . or take her up the Champlain to the point where it became as broad as the sea. There one could swim and swim, always beyond one's depth. Mighty waters at home, gay with sunlight when the Manitou was happy; fiercely black when he grew angry. Why, this hole was hardly big enough for a self-respecting bull-frog! Jean laughed.

"Ready," Jessie called. "I guess I gotta be goin' along now. If I'm late A'ntie will be mad. This is my last swim. She says it'll be too cold to go in again, an' I mustn't tease."

"Wait! Don't go yet! Something might get you . . . mebbe snakes or something. Mebbe drunks or something . . . or tramps from the line-barn. Wait! I go back with you."

"Well . . . do you think so?" she hesitated. "Well, hurry!"

Jean stood up and dashed out of the water. In a second he threw on his clothes, which stuck to his wet body, and hurried over to the girl. He found her examining her bruised toe. "I struck it on a stone," she explained.

"Gotta rag?" he asked, kneeling down to look at it.

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"No . . . nothing."

"Here," he said. "Take this," and he pulled out his pink shirt and tore a strip from the tail. He was glad it was pink, and that he had put it on clean, instead of the flannel one.

"It's such a pretty shirt . . . you hadn't ought. . . ."

"I get another mebbe . . . or Ma Billin's, she mends it," and he proceeded to wrap up the bleeding toe, tying the ends of the rag together in a ludicrous knot.

Then Jessie rose and tried to walk and they both laughed, for her great toe nodded like an old man with the tooth-ache. And so she must lean on Jean, as he insisted, and the two of them walked slowly back through the morning dew.

"Where the devil you bin?" demanded Andrew from the deck of the lemon-squeezer, as they approached the Basin. "Mis' Billin's 's kept breakfast waitin', an' Lem wants to know if ye think he can wait all day for ye? Ye better get a hustle on!"

Jean answered with a nonchalant wave of his hand and escorted Jessie to the Nellie Z.

"Where ye bin?" demanded Tim. "Up to yer Maw's tricks. . . ."

"Hush! I love Jessie. I marry her, Tim," Jean protested.

"Marry her? So that's it, is it? Well, I ain't su'prised none. . . ."

"Ye let the kid be!" yelled Andrew. "None o' yer dirty insinuations neither or I'll . . .!"

"I say I marry Jessie!" insisted Jean, puzzled by Tim's attitude.

"We love each other, is it not, *chérie*?"

"Well, yes . . . I guess so . . . I hadn't thought . . .," whimpered Jessie.

"Girls never does think," grumbled Tim belligerently.

"I marry her."

"On what, I'd like to know?"

"Soon as I make money, I marry her."

"She'll be dead by that time, an' see to it ye don't get 'er into no trouble neither, if ye ain't a'ready!"

"That's enough from you! Johnny ain't done nothin'. . . ."

"All I ask 's fer 'im to leave 'er be! Don't want 'im hangin' around. . . ."

Jean whirled about so suddenly that Tim was very nearly hurled off his feet. "I say I marry her! I mean it! We wait till then!" he shouted hoarsely, and his hot breath scorched the thin hair on Tim's head.

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"Well," he fenced, retreating. "Well, I didn't mean no harm, but. . . ."

"An' folks better not talk too much," Jean threatened. "I break 'em in my two han's. Pouff!"

Stared down, Tim retreated still further behind a bulwark of sycophancy. "Why, boy, ye're welcome to pay 'er court, now that ye got my permission. . . ."

"Permission, ye ol' scalliwag, ye! I've a mind to wash out yer dirty mind in the canal!" boasted Andrew.

"Ain't I tried to raise 'er . . . me'n Brigid . . . to be a God-fearin' woman . . . an' bringin' up a girl's no joke. . . ."

"You? You've tried to raise 'er!" declared Brigid, coming up on deck. "Small chance she'd had without her A'ntie. Young lady, didn't I tell ye to hurry right back? You go in an' eat yer victuals, an' then wash up the dishes."

Through the long hours of the night, Jean lay listening to the mad wind shrieking in from the lake, hurling its strength against the walls of the Slip in futile frenzy. A brown, mellow wind, it turned suddenly violent, bringing down showers of straggling leaves. He reached down sleepily and pulled the covers higher, and buried his nose in the pillow, always smelling fainty of canal-damp. March-born, the gale stirred the wind-madness within him, and his heart soared. He thought pleasantly of his new-born love and planned for their future together.

They would settle down somewhere on a barge . . . on the canal, or river or lake. To-morrow he would tell her all about it and let her choose . . . maybe. But he was the man, and of course, he knew best. To-morrow they would plan it all out. But to-morrow dawned; Jean overslept, and when he finally stumbled, yawning, to the deck, he found the Basin empty where the Nellie Z had been tied up. "Gone?" he demanded of Lancy.

"Sure. Tim must 'a decided to leave quite sudden. He's gone to Fort Edward."

"*Dieu!*"

"Oh, come now, you'll get over this. You're young . . . too young to get caught so soon, an' anyhow ye'll see her again . . . mebbe on the next trip up. Go get your breakfast."

CHAPTER XIX

THE news of Jean's disappearance, and of the Towman's sailing away into the north with Pierre aboard her, eventually reached the St. John country and came to the ears of Marie-Blanche. In the early fall Father Joseph got leave from his superior and visited her, bringing further news. The ship, he said, had been sighted off the Grand Banks, before it had vanished north, so there was still faint hope that it might return before winter set in . . . if not . . . ? The Father shook his head dubiously. The season was scarcely over yet, so no one could say that the Towman would not come back.

About Jean's whereabouts, Joseph told this. The boy had shipped aboard the new packet. He had left the ship at Whitehall and probably had gotten work on the canal. The priest had been trying to communicate with him ever since, but so far had been unsuccessful. He would keep on trying, of course, and at length his efforts would be rewarded, and Jean would come home at once to face his responsibilities as head of the house his father had left. Marie must be patient, he exhorted her; she must wait and pray. It was good to know that the boy was safe, safer than he would have been on board the rotten, old schooner, sailing north.

Father Joseph told them more. He said ugly rumors had been floating about Tadousac, concerning some murder . . . and the finger of suspicion pointed at Jean, the fugitive, escaping on the boat in order to save his neck. It wasn't true . . . this tale, for Joseph had run it to ground. A lie, it was, concocted by a certain wicked Archambaud and his sleek accomplice, to cover up another's crime. An old squaw had sought the priest at Point-aux-Alouettes, to warn him, otherwise he might have believed. The woman told of false evidence which had doubtless convinced Emile and Pierre of Jean's crime, and had forced them to undertake this crazy trip north, under Archie's orders. "She is the old midwife who attended you when Jean was born," Joseph told Marie. "She says Jean and Pierre will return, but too late . . . whatever

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she means by that . . . too late." Father Joseph gazed into the fire and wondered.

Joseph had gone to Tadousac to conduct a funeral and afterwards had called on this Archambaud; and gently, then angrily, he had demanded the truth. At first Archie had refused to talk. Then he said, "It is best for them to stay under cover for a time. They are all right, Father. Sure . . . they will come back when this blows over. They'd better come back. . . ." Then Joseph had threatened to reveal all he knew, and let the mob have its way with them. At last the oily Spaniard spoke up, "What you know? What *do* you know? Can you prove it?" And Joseph said quietly, "I believe you killed the sailor . . . you or some of your hirelings."

"Such accusation does not become a priest . . . besides, let me tell you, my friend, it is not healthy for any man to accuse me!" and José grabbed the friar's arm.

"Ah, so you would, would you?" Joseph demanded, eluding his grasp easily, and with one terrific blow, sent the smart José, reeling among his tables, in that den of vice. God forgive him for losing his temper! "And I would remind you, my man, that although I am a priest, I am also a descendant of that redoubtable Jean Grenon, who broke another insolent fellow's neck. I wear the robes of the order and I respect its rules, but I chastise my erring children, when I deem it necessary for their good. You cannot scare me, as you did the helpless Pierre. One word and I will bring your evil house crashing about your ears!"

Just at this point, Joseph told them, a strange thing happened, a miracle really! A young girl rushed in to summon the two blackguards. She was sobbing bitterly, and screamed at them that one Louis, 'the Dope,' was awake at last, and that he lay there on the floor, gasping for breath. Louis was afraid to die . . . poor Louis! He just slid out of his miserable bed and grabbed her knees, when she had gone to take him his soup. He had twisted her wrists till she knew they were black and blue, begging her to get a priest. He didn't want to die unconfessed . . . didn't dare face his God, with his soul black, as it was. "Wouldn't they please get a priest for Louis? Why, here was a Father now. . . . Come. . . .!"

José had started to drag her away, covering her screaming mouth with his hand, but Father Joseph had intervened and directed her to take him to Louis, promising her further protection. "The damn', little sneak, he saw ye come in!" José had snarled, but

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Joseph assured the girl he was a minister sent by God, to bring absolution and to administer extreme unction.

Marie-Blanche rose from her chair and marched angrily up and down the room. "To accuse my boy . . . the beasts!" She banged her fist down on the table and sent the dishes spinning.

But Father Joseph held up his hand to quiet her, and continued "Then the Spaniard said to me, 'Is it no longer true that a priest is forbidden to divulge a confession? This Louis is a lying, skulking rat, an' crazy with dope. He probably saw ye come in an' thought he'd start a scene. . . .' The oily one . . . I answered him not."

"Tell us more, Uncle," Henri begged, but Lucienne, always gentle, wept softly in her corner, and François cowered against his mother's skirts. Like a wooden image, young Joseph stood by the mantel and hearkened to the priest's words.

Poor Louis, facing death at last, revealed all. "Now leave me, Father. I ain't afraid. Don't stay here!" he urged Joseph. "Get out and hunt up the kid . . . Father . . . before it's too late. Tell 'im. He ain't done nothin'. They put it on 'im . . . an' doped me, an' they're goin' to shanghai the Frenchy an' his boat. Go get 'em. . . . I'm a gonner anyways. . . ." Joseph had stayed to quiet him, but he couldn't bear to tell him that the Towman had already sailed north. He waited until Louis' tired eyes closed forever. . . . Joseph made the sign of the cross. "May God forgive him," he murmured.

Later Father Joseph had forced a confession from José, but it had come too late, for the rotten, old boat was sailing toward the ice and foul winds of the north, and Jean, proved innocent at last was wandering far from home.

As he rose to leave, Joseph patted Marie's hand, and assured her he would surely reach the boy in time . . . not all of his letters could go astray. He urged her to pray for the safe return of her loved ones.

Marie-Blanche made no complaint. She endured, as life had taught her to endure. In the fall she managed the harvest well enough with the help of Joseph and Henri, and she faced the coming winter courageously . . . its inevitable small illnesses; the bread-baking; caring for the fowls and stock. More and more frequently the lumbermen appeared at her door, sometimes to beg for a light, or a drink of water, or bagosse, which was never refused. Occasionally she gave them a bite to eat, and then they

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would linger and chat idly, until there was nothing more to be said; or another and bolder would come along and make the situation awkward. Soon one or the other would mumble something half-articulate and move on toward the forest.

"It's the girls, perhaps," Marie said to herself. "That pretty, young Lucienne!" But in her heart she knew it was herself . . . not youth, but ripened, mature womanhood, and she smiled, for she still possessed charm. At her age, too, when a woman was considered old, in the lake country! She had long been desired by these woodsmen, and now that Pierre was gone, they dared express their fondness, if lamely. So she talked with them and joked with them, and the time passed pleasantly.

Twice the big boss, Samson, had come to row her to mass. A lot he cared about mass! And he openly boasted that they would drive to Robervál some fine Sunday. During the long evenings he would sit by her side, and perhaps Coli would drop in, with his accordion or his fiddle. The children were glad to see Coli, who wove fine tales with his music, but there was always fear in their eyes when Samson stood towering in the door-way, filled of yore so inadequately by little Pierre. Samson's fiery, black gaze passed over the others casually, and sought Marie . . . his scrutiny boring into her till she blushed. Then Joseph grew sullen and wished Samson at the far ends of the earth; or wished for the strength of Jean, his brother; or skill with a short-bladed knife! How Jean could have sent it whining past the rascal's head, to quiver in the wall beyond! One night he started practising with his knife, but he fumbled his shot and the blade landed at 'tit François' feet, and Lucie screamed. "What are you trying to do . . . kill one of us?" cried his mother. "Put up that knife!"

As the fall progressed into winter, Samson became difficult to manage. Subconsciously Marie realized this, but she had grown curiously lighthearted. She even sang as she performed her tasks, her mind on other things. She was absent-minded and did not notice that Lucie must work the harder to repair her neglect. Less and less often she sought the distance for Jean's well-loved figure, looming large upon the horizon, shouting "*Holà . . . Holà!*" Sometimes she would catch her breath and listen, peering intently . . . but, no . . . only a passing cloud . . . only the wind in the trees, and she lapsed into forgetfulness again. No longer did she expect Pierre, for she had come to accept his death.

It was a protection to be able to push aside reality, and enter

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this dream-world, for the girls were difficult; touchy or lacrimose, without any excuse for either. And Joseph was no fit companion for his mother. What a fidgety, bad-tempered, old man he had become; and that Henri, whose eyes refused to meet hers . . . he was a stranger! There was only 'tit François left to comfort her, and his luscious, yielding body warmed hers in the dark, cold night, for she had taken him into her bed. He was quite lost in her massive curves, but Marie must be content to doze and dream beside the sleeping child, until he wormed away from her.

More than once, of late, Samson's hand had lingered on her shoulder, and even strayed caressingly down to her voluptuous bosom. Her heart beat wildly. Had he felt its madness? She blushed and pushed his hand away, but she did not tell him to be gone, and as the children watched, their faces frozen and pale, they saw Marie-Blanche lower her eyes before his insolent gaping. Could it be that she loved this beast? Joseph sulked for two days, and wisely his mother refrained from asking him why. It was hard enough for her to endure the accusing sorrow in Lucie's eyes, and 'tite Marie's pertness. Small wonder that she lost her temper and beat young Pierre soundly for killing a silly, old hen with his sling-shot, although Heaven knew! he was ever falling into mischief, and she had seldom bothered before to reprimand him. He ran howling to the cow-shed and told Joseph.

They rejoiced when little Jules came, as he did sometimes, not as a suitor, but as a friend. He rode in from St. Joseph d'Alma and brought gifts for them all . . . baskets woven from ash-splints, red-striped peppermint-sticks and gaily colored, cotton handkerchiefs. Even Joseph smiled while he was there. But why did they come . . . so many of them since his father's disappearance? Yes, certainly, they hung about like bees around honeysuckle. Each night when they were at supper, Marie-Blanche told of meeting so-and-so in the pasture or at the edge of the wood. . . . Coli . . . Samson . . . even the crippled Barnabé, Coli's brother, whom she feared. Another day Jean-François had dropped in to help her with the milking, and Dominique brought fresh straw and bedded down the cattle for the night.

"And with me and Henri here to tend to things!" Joseph once protested to Coli.

Coli seemed to understand. "Yes, it is true," he admitted with a smile. "Well . . . perhaps Jean-Ba will return, who knows?"

"Perhaps. He is in the States . . . somewhere, so Uncle Joseph

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says. But if he comes not, think you they will marry her . . . Maman?"

"Marry her?" Coli laughed gaily, striking up a merry song on his fiddle. "Not all of them, my boy, not all of them. Marry? That's another tune."

"Marry? With Papa not dead, perhaps?" asked Lucienne, then she must stop, for Marie-Blanche came into the room, a bright, new ribbon fastened about her ample throat.

Joseph ignored her presence and continued gloomily. "Oh, the boat is lost. She will return no more. Ah . . . certainly . . . even those men from Tadousac have given her up at last."

"We've lost *'tite père* and that great Jean-Ba who stays in the States," mourned little Marie.

Marie-Blanche sniffed contemptuously and went out into the night.

"Women do marry again," sighed Lucie. "Look you . . . there's Berthe of Robervál with her third man. . . ."

"And Madame Claudette whose husband lay in the earth but a twelve-month," little Marie reminded them saucily.

"Who told you that?" demanded Lucie.

"I heard them talking."

"She must not!" declared Joseph. "I will not have it so!" he blustered. "Bringing that Samson in here to eat up what we have saved!"

"Ah, Samson . . .," murmured Coli quietly. "We shall see," and he played a sad melody, full of yearning. Perhaps he would call Marie back?

CHAPTER XX

FALL brought the potato harvest, and farmers, from north, south, east and west, poured into Whitehall, bargaining to have their loads shipped through to the New York market by barge. The agents spread the news that tows were lying idle in the Basin, and loaded trucks and carts and lumber-wagons began creeping over the roads, converging in Whitehall; and they went back empty, or laden with coal or lumber from the north country. Farmers from up Wood Creek way had the advantage, with a shorter distance to cover, but those from South Bay or over East put in a fair day's work drawing a single load.

Some sold an early crop because they needed the cash; others stubbornly held out for higher prices. Occasionally these latter won out, but again it would happen that the market was flooded and then they took a licking . . . or perhaps spring would come and discover a once fine crop of potatoes still in the cold-cellar. There were always hard-headed Yankees to advise you against either move. "Well-ll, it's come November, an' I wouldn't wait if I was you. Takin' an awful risk, loadin' much later'n this, I tell ye! Ye'll have the ol' ditch froze up on ye an' the potatoes rottin' in the hold" . . . or . . . "It don't hardly pay to load 'em, with prices what they be. I'd ruther dump 'em into the canal, or feed 'em to the hawks."

But the fear of the coming winter and no cash on hand, spurred on the procrastinators. There was Ashley's girl, lying on her back down there in the Albany hospital; Levi's son wanted to get married; Zebulon was planning to build a new kitchen for Paulina . . . she'd wanted it for so long. Joel would have doctor's bills to meet, with the coming of the new baby. Luther had set his heart on a pair of oxen . . . maybe, then, he could clear the south meadow. Henry faced a black future, with his hay spoiled, and no money with which to buy grain for his stock . . . what if his potatoes failed him, too! Oh, there were plenty of ways in which to spend this hard-earned gold. Besides Annie liked to put away a few pieces against her old age and Daniel's.

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A mild fall had lengthened the navigation period. November was easing past the middle and the canal was still free from ice, save a slight skimming on frosty mornings, which melted by noon. Once more Asaph's string of boats was tied up in the Basin, after a successful season, plying between the Champlain and New York. Back and forth, back and forth, the slow journeys through the canal speeded up, only when they reached the basin above Albany, where the tows were assembled for the trip down the river. There they met the tugs and became an integral part of a long string of barges. There they met also boats from the Erie . . . larger, prouder barges; and men from all walks of life.

Jean had become a veteran, he thought, not only on the canal, but on the great river, the Hudson. Passing Dunderberg, Bear, Storm King and Taurus, he almost forgot the grandeur of Trinity and Eternity. These lesser hills rose so abruptly from the smiling water, that they seemed to reach infinity. And here, unlike the Saguenay, there was abundant life all about him . . . strange things forever happening, which taught you to know life better. It was far more exciting to watch, than stark nature, bereft of the companionship of man. Fights were always occurring on the boats, lashed, breast to breast, with theirs, and it was hard to keep Jean out of them.

And the tales he heard! A river-man from the Mississippi told of rafts and palatial steamers, and of niggers, woodin' up. He told of levees worn away, and dreary bayous, and snags to catch the unwary.

On a busy tug a slick recruit from Chicago made hot love to the pilot's wife, and got himself stabbed in the arm for his pains. The pilot had Italian blood.

And one day Jean heard soft music and gazed across a bridge of boats into the melting, brown eyes of a fat negress. More than a little drunk, she was strumming upon a red guitar, and humming, "Black man . . . my man . . . be kind . . . a . . . to me-ee. . . ." She was the first black woman Jean had ever seen, and he returned her smile in a friendly fashion. Without any warning, a lanky, white man hustled aft from the bow, where he had been passing the time of day with some fellows on the forward barge. "I'll wipe that grin off'n yer fat face!" he growled and hit her across the mouth. "Git down an' git to work or I'll dump ye in the water, along with this fool contraption!" and he hurled the red guitar overboard, where it floated . . . a crazy toy. Jean

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dashed across the pontoon, jumped into the water and retrieved the instrument, which he handed to the gaping negress. The crimson paint of the guitar matched the trickle of blood upon her cut lip. "Come on back, ye young fool!" yelled Andrew, as Jean would have given battle. "You come back!" "Say, ye gotta learn to let such trash alone, an' mind yer own business!" advised Lancy. "That guy . . . HIM?" snarled Lem. "Why, he's one of the cussedest brutes on the Erie. And the Erie men don't always bother to marry their wimmen, neither. They take 'em an' leave 'em, when they see fit." "What's all the row about?" queried the Mississippi river-man. "Oh . . . her? Why, she ain't human . . . she ain't nothin' but a black nigger," and he spat his quid into the river. Jean was learning fast.

Fashionable ladies appeared on the great barges, which had come from Erie. They sat upon the decks, in colorful array, and took tea of an afternoon, or paraded under showy parasols, arm in arm with jaunty escorts. They crowded the decks of steamers, staring out over the water . . . listening to dreamy music. Sometimes Jean scanned the sea of faces for a glimpse of Diadama, not that she meant anything to him now, not after Jessie, but he fancied he might run across her some day. He would like to show her how firm he could be in the face of her allurements.

As they passed, the ugly, black tugs blew a saucy salute, for the steamers were grand dames, themselves, dressed up in lacy, wooden furbelows. At night they were even more beautiful, as women are, sparkling from stem to stern with jewels of lights. Jean watched them wistfully.

The Hudson was a river of mystery and romance. The mountains, fringing it, were peopled with spirits, friendly or malevolent, and the wide expanses of the Tappan Sea and the numerous coves and creeks, if mysterious by day, when half-veiled in sfumato, were stranger far by night, when the darkness fell, and infinitesimal lights appeared and disappeared like the will-o'-the-wisp. When it was foggy, whistles blew, night and day, and things lost all familiarity.

Jean felt a chill race up and down his spine when he recalled that time when their tug had screamed out in sudden defiance, and all hands had rushed up from below to see a great ship bearing down upon them. As she loomed above them, in their extreme helplessness, she seemed a veritable monster of the deep. Then the tug had come to its senses and jerked them out of her path,

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but one could feel a shudder pass along the line of boats, as the ship steamed on up the river, her lights shining mistily. Their hearts were just beginning to slow down to normal, when a cry went up from the rear. The cable had broken and five boats were adrift! Such a scramble to recapture them, and the tug fussing about like a mother hen after her recalcitrant chicks! And when it was all over, two children were missing, swept to a watery grave in the wash of the passing vessel. Oh, there was tragedy enough on this great, calm river!

Most of all Jean enjoyed the clear, crisp days of October, when violet haze covered the valleys, and lagoons, and cornstalks upon the hillsides, and far-off things seemed near at hand. The maples glowed, red and yellow: ash-trees old-gold, and willows silver-gray. And crowning the mountains were the spires of black-green. Later the slow poison of the frost dulled the hues, and naught remained save the gray of the rocks and the bare skeletons of the trees against the windswept sky . . . and, toward sunset, the fading bronze of the oaks behind the mauve of the meadows . . . and the leaden river flowing heavily past. Small gulls circled and swooped overhead, or rocked like wooden toys upon the shallow waves. Jean loved the river in all its moods.

In the north country winter had already set in, so he failed to understand when Asaph decided to undertake another trip up the canal. Shady Side and its proximity to New York appealed to Jean and, if consulted, he would have argued for tying-up at once, but Asaph and Lem figured that another cargo, brought safely through, would mean fatter purses for all. It had been done many times before, they declared, even with the threat of a mild freeze, and it could be done again. The winter would be long enough and lean enough at best. Suppose a big freeze did catch them in the Basin? Why, they could live as comfortably in Whitehall as anywhere . . . and cheaper, too. There was good hunting back there in the hills, and the lake was full of fish.

They were stoking the fires furiously with hard wood in order to keep the cabins cozy, and at the first threat of cold weather, Ma Billings had hustled them all into red flannels. Asaph bought a new ulster and presented her with a new shawl, which she admitted was lovely, but didn't they think it a bit too giddy for an old lady? Which they solemnly swore they did not. And later Pa pretended not to notice his old great-coat enveloping Adam's lean body. Lem and Lancy and Andrew wore lumber-jackets . . .

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and Jean sported a brilliant scarlet, which could be seen with the naked eye half-way across the Tappan Sea on a clear day, so Lancy said.

The morning after their arrival in Whitehall, Asaph appeared on deck at dawn. He liked to watch the sun rise, thus holding his communion with nature. He saw Skene emerge from the sable shadows of night and rear its proud head above the Slip. The water was abnormally calm and steely cold, reflecting the bleak vastness of the sky.

A few boats were tied up near his. . . . Beauty, Waterbird, Flying-Fish . . . and over yonder, Beulah Land. He chuckled happily. They were his friends, these boats, and to them he attached the personalities of their respective owners. Beauty, the neat craft of a fussy, middle-aged bachelor. Waterbird . . . indeed? Heaven knew her land-lubber of a skipper understood precious little about the water! The Flying Fish, on the other hand, belonged to a retired sea captain, sagacious and hard-headed, a tyrant with his men. Asaph knew him to be familiar with every remote corner of the earth, and every race of woman, white, black, or yellow. Just now, to the disgust of the canal-women, he had taken up with a pert wench from the French settlement, a shrewd piece, too, and likely to teach the Captain something, before he was through with her! Beulah Land, Asaph mused, a pretty name! And a good boat, moreover, the property of an ex-evangelist, who had seen plenty of trouble in his day, and a bit of disgrace, too. Pastor Virgil, by which name he was still called, derisively or affectionately, boasted some book-learning, and while he had been unlucky in the pursuit of either his former profession or his vagabond days on the water, he had a certain sentimental eloquence, which attracted the women.

Toward the sluice Asaph saw the Marigold, the Happy-lona Higley, the John Brown and the Peter Davis . . . all good fellows! Well, the great day had dawned, and here they were all ready for the potato-rush, and each man to his duty! In no time now the business would start, and things would hum till after dark.

Asaph stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled tunelessly, as he always did when he thought nobody was listening. Very shortly this roused Lem and brought him, grumbling, out of his den. Asaph noticed that he was wearing mittens, the heavy gray and black ones Ma had knit for him. "Now I know winter's come," remarked the boss drily.

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"Lance, the fool, let the fire go out, but I built her up again, an' I wa'n't too careful about bein' quiet neither. I throwed the wood around some, so I reckon he's awake by now." Lem raised his nose to the air and sniffed tentatively. "They's snow in the air . . . mebbe not to-day, nor to-morrer, but soon. . . ."

"Think so? Think it'll freeze?"

"Not right away, if the wind comes up, but I reckon we better do our loadin' quick. Hate to have us froze up now. It'd make the trip durned expensive."

"It would," Asaph agreed.

"Down to the Yule last night they was sayin' 'Lisher Tubbs was drawin' today. 'Lish had a great crop of potatoes an' he's been dickerin' with the agent all fall. Lafe Hawley's drawin', too. He raised a good crop down by the Creek . . . an' they'll be plenty of others. This cold spell had oughter bring 'em out of their holes. They'll be gettin' scairt of havin' 'em piled up in their cellars all winter. The roads'll be lousy with teams 'fore we're hardly through breakfast. Mebbe we can get loaded and off 'fore the cold spell starts, but, mark my words . . . look out for bad weather!" He shook his head ominously.

Lancy shoved his head out warily, like a squirrel scenting danger. "Whew! It's cold as hell! I've always said this town was the coldest, most Gawd-forsook hole on earth! Let's hustle an' get out of here!"

"Good mornin', Lance. Hope ye're feelin' fit an' didn't think of gettin' up till it was real cosy in there," Lem was most solicitous. "Hope I didn't disturb ye."

"Thank ye. I was cosy as a bug in a rug. Asaph, ye should have seen him! He was buildin' the fire with his mittens on. That ain't no way to treat a lady's gift."

"Shut up, ye fool!"

"Breakfast," called Ma.

"Hey," yelled Lem. "Get up, ye loafers!"

Adam appeared slowly from the cabin of the lemon-squeezer, followed by Andrew, who had paused to shake the sleeping Jean. "That kid sure likes his bed in winter! I'll bet he falls asleep again. Ground's froze some, ain't it? I expect it'll slow up the mules, but there may be a thaw, if the sun comes out. Wind's comin' up and that's a good sign."

Adam gazed down the narrow neck of the lake and turned a little gray.

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"Cold, Adam?" asked Lancy.

"No . . . no. D'ye think we'll get through all right?"

"Sho . . . sho, Adam, we'll get through all right," Andrew assured him.

"We gotta! I mean . . . I hope we do, because there's my daughter'll be expectin' me," he corrected himself. "It's damp here and the shivers come back to me. . . ." His eyes pleaded for understanding.

"Adam, I keep tellin' ye there ain't nothin' to be afraid of . . . not with us right here," Lancy encouraged him.

"Oh, I know," but his pulse beat the faster. "It's just that I'd hate to be froze in here . . . where it's sort o' bleak." Once inside he ate quickly, finishing before Jean put in an appearance, then he got up, murmured an excuse, and left.

"Holler to that lazy, young whelp an' tell him to hustle if he wants his grub," Lem called after him.

"Adam don't feel real well," said Ma anxiously.

"He's all right, ma'am," said Andrew. "Ye see, it's like this . . . it's just . . . well, ma'am, he don't like the locality around here none too well."

"He worries," she said.

"He'll be all right when we get started again," Asaph soothed her.

"I guess it's because he's always lookin' for his daughter, an' can't find her."

"Sary, I don't know as he's got a daughter. I think mebbe . . . she's . . . well . . . a pipe-dream, sort of. He's scairt of somethin' . . . plumb scairt out of his wits."

"Oh, Lem, I think he's got a girl all right, but I'm afraid mebbe he won't feel any happier when he meets up with her. That's worryin' me. I wonder what she's like? He's scairt of somethin', but I can't help admirin' the way he faces it alone. He plans to be right out there on deck when whatever's is comin' comes. . . ."

"I guess mebbe he's done time, Sary, but I won't think Adam ever done anythin' real wicked. I reckon it was all a mistake."

"The law makes a heap of mistakes," Andrew nodded wisely. "Now I recollect once. . . ."

Jean clattered down the steps. "The teams are comin'! Adam saw 'em. Many! Hurry!"

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"Hurry up, yourself! Ye get up later ev'ry mornin', I declare," grumbled Lem, grabbing his cap and leaving.

By noon the sun managed to elude the thick cloud-bank, and shone fitfully. Apparently the weather was holding off. Great-coats and jackets were thrown aside and the men were sweating over their work. Fine potatoes fell to Asaph's lot, for agents and farmers knew his boats were dry. Load after load tumbled into the holds, and yet Jean felt that there were not potatoes enough in all Whitehall to fill those black, yawning caverns. Such phrases as 'heap-measure' and 'fifty—sixty bushel to the load', and 'gross' and 'net' fell upon his bewildered ears. Funny! Asaph and Lem and Lancy knew just how many bushels it would take to fill the two barges and how many the lemon-squeezer would hold, while the only way Jean could keep track was by jotting down a series of hieroglyphics on the side of the boat . . . crosses for the roan horses; circles for the grays; checks for the white and bay, hitched together; wedges for the blacks, since these were the teams reappearing most frequently. For the little chestnut with the blind eye, which came only once a day, dragging a smaller load down from South Bay, after some consideration, he used a horizontal line. And in the end he was put to some trouble, and thrown into a state of confusion, trying to assemble his crosses, wedges, checks and circles, with a few awkward lines thrown in.

CHAPTER XXI

WORD came that the Nellie Z was anchored below the middle bridge, and Jean was interested at once, so after supper he stated his intention of paying his respects to the O'Learys.

"Well, see ye don't get into no trouble," cautioned Lem. "Can't tell what trick they might play on ye."

"Come along with us. Me an' Lancy thought we'd go up-town for a little refreshment. Been thirsty all day, seems like," said Andy.

"Don't ye go swillin' too much kill-devil. . . ."

Jean managed to shake his escorts at the entrance to the Yule, then strolled on past Burkit's, stopping awhile to examine the display of food in the window . . . raised doughnuts, cookies, an enormous pumpkin pie and the very same, old chocolate cake . . . or maybe one just like it . . . and now a little gray under the glass. He fingered the knob tentatively, but, no, he reminded himself of his destination and walked on. Some day he would own a barge like the Nellie Z . . . or maybe a bigger one, on the Erie. Then after that, a black and red tug, dragging a trail of smoke down the river. He could see himself at the wheel of the sturdy craft, puffing past the Palisades. And Jessie by his side . . . sure, why not?

It was pitch dark beneath the bridge, and he recalled the wild stories Lance and Andy had told him about the murders of '47. Peering through the gloom, he could scarcely make out the feeble rays of the bow-lantern, but as he crossed the street and came into closer proximity, he saw a dim light in the windows of the stern cabin. "*Holà! Holà!*" he cried.

"Who's there?" growled a voice forward.

"Me . . . Jean Grenon!" he called back boastfully.

"The Fightin' Frenchy? Get t' hell out o' here! Always sneak-in' up in the dark . . . ain't got the guts to fight by day!"

"But . . . *sapristi!* I come down an' lick ye!"

"Shut-up Bull. Seems like ye never know when ye're well off. Can't take a swig 'thout it makes ye ugly's the devil. That you,

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Johnny? Come on in, an' don't mind *him*. You shut up, I tell ye!" called Tim.

"Jessie here?"

"Oh, 'tis her ye've come to see? Thought maybe 't was Bull an' me. Well, Brigid an' her went over to the Beulah boat . . . more'n half an hour ago . . . went for a bit of soul-savin' . . . camp-meetin', ye know. Begorry, an' in this weather, too! I prefer to hang around the stove. Come in," he urged the boy.

"I want to see Jessie. Your boat pull out last time an' leave me. She don't say good-bye. . . ."

"Oh, sure, I know what ye're meanin', Johnny. Sure . . . but I gotta take care o' her, ain't I? I gotta be sure ye ain't meanin' no harm. She's my brother's girl, an' he's dead, an' she ain't never knowed her Maw. We gotta be careful . . . me an' Brigid. I ain't got nothin' against ye."

"The Beulah? I know . . . she's tied-up by us. Well . . . good-bye."

"What's yer hurry? About these here camp-meetin's, now . . . I don't hold with such goin's-on in the name o' religion, not when ye're an honest-to-God Cath'lic, but Brigid gets the hankerin' from her Maw, as was a Methody. She takes natural to hymn-singin' an' shoutin'. Have a drop o' w'iskey to warm ye up?"

"But, no . . . I run along. Maybe I come back."

"Sorry I can't tempt ye, but ye do that . . . come back an' I'll have a toddy ready for ye . . . some good ol' belly-wash, flavored up with the best Santa Cruz rum. I'll slip me flip-dog into the fire now to have 'er good an' hot," Tim offered cordially.

"Sure . . . toddy . . . that's good! I come back," and Jean rushed out, keeping on the canal-side of the road, lest he run into Lance and Andy. He made his way back to the Basin and approached the Beulah Land. Wheezing strains came to his ear, mere rudiments of sound, and strident female voices, accompanying a lone baritone. Jean scrambled up on deck and fumbled for the latch of the cabin-door. It opened and he peered in, blinking until his eyes became used to the light.

"For Heaven's sakes, come on in, an' shut the door! Ye're lettin' in a draught," a woman whispered to him.

Jean gazed about him, looking for Jessie, but she was in the farther end of the room. Brigid sat in the only rocker, pushed back into the kitchen-alcove; and Jessie, perched on the arm of her chair, like a scared bird, ready to take flight, blushed as she

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caught his eye. Ma Billings and another woman sat on the bed beside Virgil's three, flaxen-haired children, who kept themselves hidden in the folds of the calico bed-curtain, and peeked out occasionally like frightened, half-wild kittens. On four camp-stools sat the bold French hussy from the Flying Fish . . . what could the Cap'n have been thinking of to let her come? . . . and perforce rubbing elbows with her, the honest wives of the skippers of the Peter Davis, the Waterbird and the Marigold, whose boats lay alongside.

Virgil, his soul starved for ritual, had been put to some pains to create an atmosphere. He had pushed the box-couch out from the wall, and had placed a candle-stand behind it, and upon this he spread out his Bible. In the corner was the small melodeon, his one luxury, which he had bought last year in Albany. Seated upon the sofa, facing him, was his wife, a small, pale blonde. Beside her sat old Adam, forced against his will into a place of prominence, and beyond him the wives of the Happytona Higley and the John Brown.

As Jean entered the already over-crowded room, Virgil lifted his hands dramatically from the key-board and called cordially, "Welcome, stranger. . . . Welcome! Even though your sins be as scarlet . . . welcome. Find a seat, pray."

Jean looked around him, but saw none vacant. He shrugged his big shoulders and braced himself against the wall, ready to wait till this silly business should be terminated.

"Take the foldin'-chair by the window, Johnny," Ma told him. "It opens up."

"Ah, sure," he grinned, grabbing it.

The French woman elbowed the others against the wall, in her effort to make room for him beside her. He seated himself gingerly, for he was large, and the chair small. It gave with his weight, but it held him, and, reassured, he looked over and grinned at Jessie. "Ah . . . Jessie . . . Jessie," he mouthed her name. "Here I be . . . Jessie. . . .!"

Timorously she smiled back, but put her finger to her lips and pointed toward the master of ceremonies, who was waiting for Jean to get settled. Virgil was temperamental about the attention of his audience . . . and, if the truth were known, a bit scared by Jean's size. Suppose he should stand up suddenly? . . . his great head would punch a hole through the roof! Virgil played a few chords rather elegantly, Jean thought, then raising his voice, sang

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with fervor, his favorite, "Beulah Land," the hymn for which he had named his boat. Instantly the women joined in, Brigid improvising a rich harmony.

Toward the end of the song Jean found himself humming and his feet beating time. "Beulah Land . . . that's the name of his boat," he thought, which was all he understood of the words. He watched the Reverend Virgil closely . . . Virgil . . . a funny name! Maybe there was a song about that, too? Red mounted over the evangelist's pink face and bald head, for he was warming deliciously to his work. His big, hairy hands lingered over the keys, rather effectively hiding his lack of skill. Bet I could lick him, with one hand tied behind my back! mused Jean, and all of a sudden he didn't like this preacher. He wasn't like the black-robed Jesuits at home, nor yet like that white-haired man who had stood above Ruhama's yawning grave, and talked about the hills.

Virgil was thinking how good it was to worship his God. "Truly, nothing gives me greater satisfaction!"

After the hymn and a belated amen from one of the ladies, a lull followed, and Jean considered it a fitting time for him to greet Jessie. "Jessie," he called, softly for him, and his black eyes shot fire. She closed her eyes and gasped for breath, then she smiled timidly.

"Say, feller, remember I'm here, too," the French girl whispered, nudging him, but Jean ignored her.

Virgil had started another hymn, and they joined in lustily, "On Christ, the sol—id rock—I stand . . . all oth—er groun' is—sinkin' sand. . . ." Jean noticed Adam's cheeks wet with tears, and that his bony, knotted fingers trembled, as he tried to brush them away. What? What were they doing to him? What had this preacher-fellow said? Jean was instantly on the defensive. *Sapristi!*

Perhaps Virgil had perceived Adam's emotion, too, for now he was leaning sidewise, away from his instrument, with his eyes rivetted on the poor man's face. Directly he changed the key with a few mellow chords, and broke into, "Who'll be the next to foller Je—sus? Who'll be the next . . . Who'll. . . ." Two stanzas of this, and the leader changed his tune again. "Rescue the per—ishin' . . . Care for the dy—in'," he droned out. Bringing this to an end, he stopped and stood up, and clasping his hands piously upon his breast, unfolded his ungainly body to a really stupendous height.

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Jean scrutinized him narrowly. The eyes were earnest enough . . . unnaturally bright perhaps, but the lower part of the face and the lips were ugly . . . mean ; and, with the snap judgment of youth, Jean hated him. But he must sit there quietly and listen to sounds until this fool chose to be done!

And now he was talking, "Brothers an' Sisters, an' our poor repentant Brother, here," he gesticulated grandly. "I pray ye, come to Gawd. He wants ye! He's waitin' . . . waitin' to let in even the vilest sinner . . . even the lowest amongst ye!" Then he held out his arms, almost striking Adam in the face, and continued to repeat softly a sort of chant, "Come to Gawd . . . Come, all ye sinners, come! Even if yer sins be as scarlet, he will wash 'em away, my childrun."

Adam searched wildly for an easy exit, but his way was blocked, and like a trapped thing, he cowered. Ma put her hand on his arm, trying to pacify him, but the awful voice went on, pleading, strained and shrill, as it rose to a harsh falsetto, "Come unto me an' I will give ye rest. . . . I, even I. . . ." The voice fell seductively, for Virgil had already succumbed to the passion of his own voice; he had lost his identity in the image of God, moulded from the fibre of his own pusillanimous being.

The voice, now crooning, now hysterical, scorched Adam's tortured nerves. "Peace will be yours . . . forgiveness. . . ." It grew louder and rumbled in the rafters. It had become distinct, separated from the man. It was no longer a mere organ of expression; it was a tongue of fire, divinely inspired, so Virgil would have said. To Adam it was terror! It persisted, "My way is the only way . . . the path that leads to life everlastin'. Now, that path yonder," pointing by chance toward the north, "leads to hell . . . burnin', boiling hell! The just reeward of all black sinners . . . an' liars an' thieves an' murd'ers!" he went on elaborately, then paused for breath.

"An' harlots . . . an' them that seduces. . . . A—men," interposed the woman from the Happy-lona, and she glared straight into the eyes of the French woman, who giggled. Let her talk! Everyone on the canal had felt the barbs of her sharp tongue!

For the moment, however, Virgil was disconcerted, so he closed his eyes in silent prayer . . . or perhaps he was forcing himself back into the rhythm of his emotion, for shortly he reopened them and appeared to stare directly at Adam. How could Adam know that evangelist saw him not, that once again he was inspired, nay,

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enfevered by his own eloquence . . . carried miles away from the sordid reality of revivalism. He was in that Paradise, lost to Adam and Eve. He lifted his head and poured forth his declamation, "Come unto me . . . an' I will wash ye whiter than snow . . . the driven snow," and scraps, fragments, loosely strung together bubbled from his lips . . . a jig-saw puzzle of biblical phrases, ill-remembered. "Fear not, for I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again . . . yea, verily. . . . In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so . . . if it were not so. . . ." He swallowed with difficulty and brought his gaze back to the level of the passion in the French girl's eyes. "March with me to Zion . . . Zion, beautiful city of Zion . . . ! We're marchin' upward to Zi—on, beautiful city of Gawd. . . ." With a luxurious sigh, he closed his Book. "Repent ye. . . . Repent ye, my friends in sin. An' now we will listen to any test'monials. Gawd will hear even the most humble. Come, my childrun, confess! CONFESS!" he boomed forth suddenly, not knowing what he said.

Adam, tortured beyond endurance, shrieked and jumped to his feet. "But I ain't done nothin', I tell ye! Nothin' to be ashamed of! They pinned it on me, they did, 'cause they hated me an' wanted what little I'd got. They knew I was too scairt to tell on 'em. They had me locked up, and I served my time. Honest, Mister, I ain't done nothin' . . . I don't know who tol' ye, nor what it's all about . . . them words of yourn. Ye're right, it was hell up north . . . there . . . an' I can't never rest, thinkin' about it, an' thinkin' all the time they'll come mebbe. They might kill me next time, like they said . . ." his voice trailed off and he fell back on the couch, sniveling weakly.

Ma motioned to Jean and he rushed forward to lift the old man. He was astonished to hear Pastor Virgil still supplicating gently, persuasively, "Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give ye rest." Jean stopped and stared at the man. Why, he hadn't been talking to Adam at all . . . but to the French woman from the Flying Fish! His eyes were burning . . . ardent . . . and he breathed heavily. The girl smiled and rose, swaying a little, then tottered forward, her arms outstretched, her hungry fingers clawing. Virgil's wife saw her brazen boldness and turned away, blushing. There was a dead hopelessness in her eyes. . . . Jean had seen it in the expiring gaze of the slaughtered lambs, at home.

"Come, boy, lift Adam up a bit," ordered Ma Billings. "Never

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mind them." Ma chafed his hands, and Jessie brought water in the tin dipper and held it to his twitching lips.

The woman from the Happytona said it was a "cryin' shame"; and the wife of Peter Davis asked Ma if she didn't think it was a fit . . . epilepsy . . . or maybe a stroke. They worked over him anxiously, all the time casting angry glances at Virgil and the wench, who was hanging on to him.

Jessie was sorry for them and ashamed for them at the same time. And more than anything, she was sorry for Virgil's little wife. She had risen and stood with fists clenched and arms held stiffly against her sides. Red spots burned on her high cheekbones, and she gazed straight ahead, as if afraid to witness the wanton shame of those two. She gasped ineffectually . . . and was silent, and the smallest child, stared at his mother, and perceiving no answering warmth in her eyes, ventured a sickly grin, then started to weep bitterly, noisily, indecently, through sheer inability to restrain himself longer.

"Hush yer noise!" bellowed Virgil. "Stop the brat's bawlin', can't ye?" But his wife never moved, and the baby cried the louder. Jessie searched a brief instant in the folds of her sacque, and drew out a small, red-striped peppermint, which she popped into his mouth. So unexpected was it, that he continued to hold his mouth open for a long moment, before he started sucking busily.

Was this religion, Jean thought, as he went through the mechanical process of supporting Adam's inert body, or was it an unnameable something between man and woman? Something in the heart of one which answered the silent call of the other? Thus the mountain-lion replied to its mate; thus the black bear, and the brown; the moose; tamed beast; and man. Jean watched the pathetic wife, whose face was working pitifully, for tears were coming at last to assuage her grief. Impulsively the boy pushed Adam's head against Ma's shoulder, and stood up, towering above the tall preacher. In a tense, low voice, he called, "Shut up, ye fool! An' sit down . . . or I smash ye one . . . so hard, ye sleep . . . mebbe forever! *Sacré nom de Dieu!* Talk . . . talk . . . talk . . . all time an' say nothin'!"

Virgil turned away from the woman and coughed to cover his confusion. He wished he weren't a coward. He wished that his knees were not shaking.

"See here, Johnny, ye mind me, an' don't start any fuss now!

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We got to get Adam home," Ma stopped him summarily. "I told ye not to mind *them*!"

"No, I should say not!" snapped Mrs. Davis, rising to gather up her shawl. "An' I for one have had about enough of *his* preachin'. Are ye comin', Sary . . . an' what about you, Happy-lona? Brigid, I'm goin' your way a piece. . . ."

"Come, Adam . . . we go home."

"A'ntie says to walk along with you. She's got somethin' to say to Louetta," Jessie whispered to Jean.

"I'll be sayin' good-night, Mis' Butters," Mrs. Billings murmured politely, shaking the nerveless arm of Virgil's wife. "I enjoyed the singin' real well . . . an' don't ye be at all disturbed about Adam. He's been feverish ever since the cold weather set in, an' sometimes he gets notions in his head an' imagines things, but it ain't nothin' but malary. He's lots better'n what he was, too. To-morrer he'll likely be all right, an' won't remember a thing that happened to-night.

"I don't know 's I'm called on to apologize for Adam," she continued, as she took Jessie's arm and they followed slowly after Adam and Jean. "Virgil's the one made a fool of himself, not Adam. I should think he an' that girl had showed off pretty well, if ye ask me! I shouldn't have took Adam, but he seemed kind of forlorn with the boys gone, an' Pa an' Lem playin' checkers. . . ."

"Maybe Virgil can't help it," said Jessie. "Seems like he's plumb crazy over Louetta. A'nt Brigid saw them down by the line-barn 'fore supper. She says she bets he don't treat his wife decent either. A'ntie says just to wait till the Cap'n finds out about him an' Louetta, an' there'll be somethin' doing! He'll brand her with a flat-iron like he did the nigger-cook."

"They're singin' again. . . . Listen!" said Ma, changing the subject, and through the night they could hear, "Sweet hour of prayer . . . that calls me . . . from a world . . . of care . . .," led by Brigid O'Leary's full contralto. Courageously she sang it through to the end, then wrapping her shawl about her, she bade them all good-night, and grasping Louetta's wrist firmly, bade her come along. "I'm goin' your way," she said.

"But," objected Louetta. "I'd planned to stay an' talk a little while. . . . Ye see, it's like this. . . . I all of a sudden got religion. . . . I can see how I been wrong . . . something stirred me, like I've never been stirred."

"You come along."

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"But . . . he says he'll wash my sins whiter than snow. He's showed me the wickedness of my ways. . . . I want him to touch me an' make me whole again . . ." she wailed.

"It ain't religion ye got! Ain't ye got any shame . . . before his wife, too? Ye're coming along with me, if I have to yell for that big boy to come an' fetch ye! One good duckin' in the canal will cure the religion ye got. *Re-ligion!* Ye don't know what it is! These childrun has got to go to bed . . . an' the Cap'n 'll likely be wonderin' what's happened to ye," Brigid added enigmatically, as she stared Virgil down, and dragged the girl through the door. "Good-night, folks," she called back.

"I can take care o' myself!"

"Mebbe he don't think so. . . . Mebbe if he was to know ye was meetin' anybody up in back of the line-barn, he might get mad." She held on to the girl's arm till they reached the tow-path. "I don't know's you ever heard the story of the mulatter girl that was one of the Cap'n's . . . er . . . wives? No? Well, it ain't a pretty story, an' I ain't sayin' it's true . . . you know how such things get started . . . but the tale goes that he caught her gallivantin' with the second mate, an' strung her up by the thumbs. As for the mate, they say, *he* walked the plank. Of course, that happened quite a while ago in the Indian Ocean, where they ain't very particular what happens to second mates and cap'ns' wenches."

"Why, I don't b'lieve it! Besides this here is a civilized country! Ketch him tryin' any of his funny stunts an' he'd be strung up himself!"

"Queer things happen on the canal. Folks disappear an' ye never know what's become of 'em. I just thought I'd tell ye . . . in case ye hadn't heard. It's generally safer to stick to yer own man an' let other wimmen's alone . . . on the canal . . . an' then the Cap'n's right handy with his knife, too . . . learned to use it in some foreign parts, I expect . . . an' brandin' irons, too, I hear." Brigid allowed her voice to drop to a whisper.

"Why are ye tellin' me all this? Tryin' to scare the wits out o' me!" whimpered Louetta. She shuddered, for once she had seen him beat a dog. "I've stuck to him so far, ain't I?"

"Oh, sure! I just thought I'd ought to warn ye to be careful. The Cap'n's a queer bugger, when he gets crossed. Of course, this happened long ago . . . an', as I say, when he was sailin' foreign seas. Why, here we are! Well, good-night, an' I hope ye sleep well. I'll prob'ly see ye again." Brigid marched on to join Jean and Jessie. "Well, I guess I settled her goose!"

CHAPTER XXII

By noon of the fourth day they were ready to start. Lancy whipped up the lead mule and Andrew followed; then Jean and the lemon-squeezer. They called farewell to some of the canal men, still busy loading. Others were as fortunate as they and were hustling to get through the locks at the same time. Here conversation dragged itself out sociably, heatedly, aimlessly. Feeling still ran high over the election. The Democrats considered the choice of Hayes arbitrary, when, Heaven knew, Tilden was the people's choice!

One lock-keeper knew a man in Alpine who owned the finest shad-nets on the Hudson, and he invited Lem to take a few days off next spring during the run. He'd show him some real sport and a few silver dollars into the bargain! He was interrupted by a man who hailed from Albany, who spoke in favor of the mighty sturgeon, the good, ol' "Alb'ny beef". "Sturgeon? Shad?" said Jean contemptuously, being well-acquainted with neither. "But . . . salmon is the king of fish . . . and his little brother, the ouananiche! Oh, the big fellers I've caught over by the Décharge . . . back at my home on the lake!" he bragged.

"Ouananiche? What's that?" they asked him.

"Salmon, too, but he get caught sometimes when he go up the river to spawn, an' he say there always, an' mebbe never find his way down again. Perhaps he get away . . . sometime . . . like me. . . ."

"Oh, the crazy Frenchy! Hear 'im talk!"

Ma Billings hoped they would have fine weather for Thanksgiving. They would probably celebrate somewhere on the river. Perhaps Lem could get wild duck for them . . . or even turkey? Chicken was always good, though.

Asaph's string of boats gradually eased to the next level, and went on, and just ahead of them was the Nellie Z, pulling out. Tim hailed them affably from the tiller, but Bull strode along the tow-path, beside the mules, never once turning his head.

Snow-flakes began to fall from the louring sky, lazily at first,

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then with steady persistence. A raw wind blew straight from the north, passing over the lake. Canal life shivered, and Ma's Maltese cat stuck to her warm place beneath the stove. At last the spell of weather, so long threatening, was upon them. Lancy squinted at the sky, and finding nothing there to comfort him, whistled "John Brown's Body" in a minor key. "Oh, well," he remarked to no one in particular, "If she's comin', why she's comin'," and he turned his attention to the nigh-mule, who was letting the others do the pulling. "Giddap, ye raw-boned hellion!"

Astern Andrew was riding upon the back of a jet-black jenny. He turned around at times to watch Jean, striding beside his two-mule hitch, like a colossus. The boy reminded Andrew of stories he had heard in his wanderings, of a race of giants once inhabiting the earth. They had built walls some place in Greece, and queer, round temples in England. He hadn't believed the tall stories then, but perhaps they were true. From the corner of his eye, he caught a foreshortened glimpse of Adam, standing beside the tiller of the truncated boat, old and sad, the skirts of his voluminous ulster flapping like crows' wings about his legs. Until they had passed beyond Whitehall, Adam's eyes frequently sought the lake, fading into the distance; after that, he straightened his shoulders and focussed his gaze ahead, still searching.

The snow came faster and melted icily upon their cheeks. Feet of men and animals made brown patterns on the white tow-path. Sometimes Jean would run ahead a little way to warm himself, and to call gaily to Jessie, who stuck her head out to see about the weather. Lem shouted to him and he ran back, zig-zagging, spiraling, fascinated by the design his heavy brogans etched in the snow. He felt as skittish as a thorough-bred hunter at the first sign of frost in the air.

Beyond Fort Ann the temperature took a sudden drop and the snow grew fine and dry, sifting down like powder; piling up in miniature banks on caps and shoulders. And the patterns on the tow-path were lost.

"Guess she's settled in for a good one," complained Adam dolefully. "Will it hold us back, d'ye think, Andrew?"

"This here's better than a freeze," Andrew tried to cheer him.

But, by the time they had reached Kingsbury, it had stopped snowing, and the wind abated. And simultaneously the cold grew more intense, gnawing savagely at ears and noses and finger-tips.

"Gol' darn the pesky weather! This sure looks bad! It'll

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freeze, sure's I'm preachin'," growled Lem. "Better speed up."
"Well, Lemon, it ain't froze yet, and mebbe the sun'll come out."

All night the men worked in shifts, resting in between. Women and children took their turns, striving to get the caravan through. Once Ma could be seen, guiding the mules from the deck, and again she stood by the rudder, bundled up in her shawls. Lock-keepers were on hand to despatch the boats as quickly as horsepower would allow, and water would rise to a new level. Asaph felt they were fortunate to be traveling in the wake of the Nellie Z. The biggest barge on the Champlain, she was a trail-blazer and would be the first to come upon frozen water. She could plough through anything, with her big, ugly nose! Just above the entrance to the Glens Falls feeder, they struck still water . . . only a slight coating of ice, which didn't hinder progress. There was some delay at the locks in Fort Edward, but from there on the water caravan passed along more rapidly for a time, with each fresh relay of mules, and aided by the livelier current of the river. Hopes were running high once more.

Just before daybreak the thermometer slipped below zero, and Lem came in, with the changing of the shifts, to warm his fingers, which he swore were frost-bitten. Ma poured cold water on his hands and fed him hot coffee, and he threw himself down on the couch and fell asleep. Then she sat down to listen to the pack-peddler, whom the Happytona had taken on, because he couldn't get other transportation, and had professed himself willing to help. Thereafter he spent most of his time, passing up and down the line, urging his wares upon the women-folks . . . stockings, suspenders, stays . . . a few, dusty, foreign linens, cotton handkerchiefs and small bottles of scent . . . black rubber combs and hair-pins. He regaled them with stories of a tavern, ambiguously "back east," where they had just found human bones, while digging a cellar-hole. "Many's the pedlar like meself's disappeared off'n the face of the earth," he told Mrs. Billings. He had kind, black eyes, a hooked nose and a grizzled beard, which partly concealed his pock-marked face. Ma thought he looked lean, so she offered him food, but he pushed the pork aside and ate the beans and fried potatoes.

"No boats've gone through all day," he said. "An' this'll be the las' trip down." He rose up and thanked her, and departed to help the men with the new relay.

Still they moved on. Steam from the mules' nostrils froze white

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on their muzzles, and icicles formed on moustaches and beards.

As light streaked the eastern sky, they were passing through lowlands. Here patches of back-water were frozen solid. The Nellie Z slowed down to a snail's pace, and now came to a bumping halt. The whole line quivered and stopped abruptly. "What's the matter?" called Asaph. "Who-a-a . . . there!"

"We're froze in. Open water just ahead, though, an' the current's stronger. If we can pull 'er out o' this piece o' freak ice, we're all right."

"The Nellie Z's stuck . . . froze in!" Lem called back and the cry was repeated down the line to the Marigold which brought up the rear. "Froze in . . . Froze in. . . ."

Lancy and Andy walked forward to see what they could do. Whipping up the mules was useless, likewise yanking on their halters, so Lancy went back to unhitch his team and drive them forward. The six animals tugged and pawed the frozen ground, and remained in their tracks. The boat sidled along two or three inches, then settled back. Ma called Lem and he came up to view the situation. He figured that the ice couldn't be very thick and that they must chop their way through, so Tim, Bull, Lem, Andrew and Jean hacked away with axes and picks . . . then Lancy and Jean and Bull, and some of the men from the boats in the rear . . . but always Jean and Bull vying with each other, showing off their amazing strength.

They hacked away until they saw the narrow crack widen, and black water spreading through the crevice. Cheers arose from the bank-side. Lancy goaded the mules and the Nellie Z advanced a few feet, then stuck again, ice piling up about her squared-off prow. They chopped again . . . more cautiously because of the open water ahead. Then they stood back, sweating in the zero weather and watched the animals straining to drag the big barge forward, but she held back stubbornly.

Bull swore and ripped off his lumber-jacket, spat out his quid and swore again . . . blood-curdling oaths, which fascinated Jean. Never before had he heard such perfect artistry. And all at once he began to admire the uncouth anthropoid. "Damn ye," he finally yelled at the mules, whose ears were now laid back against their heads in stubborn resistance. "Damme, if I don't hitch meself up with ye an' drag 'er through! Lousy, ol' scow, built too heavy for this stinkin' ditch! Can't leave 'er lay here like an ol' sow with her belly stuck in the frozen mud!"

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"What?" inquired Jean.

"Aw, he's goin' to hitch hisself up with the mules. Damn' boat-hoggy! He's ha'f mule anyhow," drawled Lem.

"He's ha'f ape," Lancy corrected him.

"Ye—ah. . . ."

Bull stepped up to the lead-mule and grabbed the halter, yanking fiercely, but to no avail. Then he stepped back and kicked the animal savagely in the ribs.

"Ya—ah, stop 'im!" yelled the crowd.

"Stop that, ye cussed fool! If he lays off an' kicks ye back, ye won't know what's struck ye!" Tim warned him. "Ye'll wake up in hell!"

Bull glared at him. "Then why in hell don't nobody help me, 'stead o' standin' there an' gawpin' like damn' fools? Hey, you, Frenchy, ye're full o' tricks. Can't ye think o' some way to fool these brutes? C'mon now an' show us yer stren'th, if ye call yer-self a man!"

"Sure . . . Me, I show 'im!"

"Keep yer shirt on!"

"Don't be a fool! He'll have ye in the canal yet!"

"But, no . . . I show 'im!"

"You stay here!"

"But . . . see . . . ice all crack up an' water over there. Me, I pull 'er out easy!" Jean grabbed the halter of the head mule and pulled, but the beast was canny and refused to budge. "Nev' mind. *Attendez!* Wait! I fix 'em." He patted the beast's head, rubbed his quivering nose, until the ears twitched sensitively; then urging the animals quietly, backed them until the tow-line was slack. This he wound once about his waist.

"What'er ye doin', ye crazy fool? Don't ye know it'll throw ye in? That's what'll happen!" scolded Lem.

"Drive on the mules," Jean called to Lancy, then he laughed and grabbed the rope behind him and pulled with all his might. The boat moved, the ice creaked and the crevice widened . . . only a foot or so.

"What about hitchin' on another team?" Andrew asked Lem.

"Nine mules on that there path? They'd get all messed up in the lines."

"Here, you, Bull . . . c'mon an' help. Grab aholt here!" commanded Jean.

Bull glowered and held back, then he grunted and rolled for-

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ward on his great, flat feet and grabbed the rope behind Jean. "Giddap . . . you!" he yelled to the beasts.

"Heave . . . ho! . . . Heave . . . ho! . . . Heave . . . ho!" chanted the chorus from the bank . . . none of the others offering to help. It was as if by tacit agreement, they were watching the struggle of two legendary heroes. They viewed the contest with equanimity, as they might an ox-pulling at a county fair. No one must interfere, and let the best man win!

Under Lancy's lash the mules threw themselves against their harnesses, the men pulled and the boat lurched coquettishly forward, as if she would show these humans she would stay there all winter, if she took the notion in her head, and who could prevent her? Then she came on so suddenly that Jean and Bull were caught unaware and barely missed being hurled on top of the beasts. A wild cheer rose from the bank.

"There she goes, the big bum! We're through!" roared Bull, as Jean pulled him to his feet. "Gawd damn! Together, feller, you an' me could pull a engine!" and he landed a resounding wack on Jean's back.

The boy's eyes shone. "Me . . . I'm a towman . . . towman . . . feller tugs a boat!" he announced, pounding his heaving chest. "Towman," he repeated reminiscently, and for a moment saw the vision of the old windjammer . . . her shrouds black across the livid face of the moon. "I wonder where they be now?"

"Towman . . . where've I heard that name before?" mused Andrew.

"Gee'z, I didn't think ye had it in ye!" Bull exclaimed, smiling crookedly, trying to show his friendliness. "Say, kid, with trainin' ye could show them smart buys in Noo York! Stick clost to me when we git to the city an'. . ."

"Say, will ye shut-up an' get goin'?" bellowed Tim. "S'pose ye want us to freeze in again?"

"I am, ain't I? I was just tellin' the kid I could train 'im for the mat. . ."

"Yeah . . . you! Better mind yer own business!"

"Get goin'! Ye're blockin' our way!" shouted Lancy.

"An' when we want anythin' from ye . . . with yer murderin' tricks, why we'll send ye word!" declared Lem.

"Aw, go to the devil! Giddap, ye white-livered brutes! Ye lazy coots . . . waitin' fer a man to drag ye! Giddap. . ."

Jessie waved to Jean from the deck of the Nellie Z.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARIE-BLANCHE stood, like some brooding sculpture of Mother Earth, and watched the sun setting in flames, and the smouldering clouds chasing southwest in the wind, across the bald ridges of the mountains. For a long moment she stood in the open door-way and gazed out over the white landscape. Like a high-bred mare, she scented the keenness of the air, redolent with pitch. She breathed deeply, and the frost stiffened the hairs of her nostrils.

"Oh, *Maman*, close the door, please. My feet . . . they freeze!" begged 'tite Marie, who crouched upon a three-legged stool by the hearth.

"*Toi!*" snorted her mother contemptuously. "You cold, little thing . . . with water in your veins instead of good, red blood! Come . . . breathe in the fine air and warm up your sluggish blood. See! Like me!"

"My teeth chatter," the girl whimpered. "I am cold . . . so cold. I don't know why . . . but ever since yesterday. . . ."

Marie did not wait to hear, but stepped without and slammed the door to behind her, while 'tite Marie shivered gratefully and bent closer to the fire.

Grande Marie continued to look out over the fields and hills, staring fearfully down the valley, whence came far-off echoes of industry. Near at hand, the barn and shed stood out like a blot of blood against the stark whiteness of the landscape. Somehow they reminded her of Pierre, perhaps because he and Jean had painted them but last spring. How he had grumbled because François had kicked over a pail of paint! The upper story of the barn jutted out beyond the lower, and cast an elongated shadow on the snow. With a sigh Marie turned away from the familiar outlines.

Rail-fences crawled across the unbeaten blanket of white . . . over the foot-hills . . . up . . . up . . . till they met the lowest stratum of silver birch, shards of color still clinging to bare branches, and tufts of snow swaying crazily upon them. In the distance the mountains loomed, cobalt against a vibrant sky, and blacker, as

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they came nearer, and their fir-crowned contours stood out clearly.

There was François over yonder on the knoll the children called La Colline . . . short, fat and awkward, bundled up to his eyes. Solemnly he dragged his green and yellow bob-sled up the hill, and just as solemnly slid down again. Her body warmed to him. Little François, always the heart of her heart . . . more hers than the others . . . the soul of her life! Marie gazed at him, then flushed heavily. But, no, he did not fulfil her desires . . . not quite. She sighed and looked away, frowning. Beast! To have such thoughts! Was she not an honest woman? Ah, but she was young still . . . and her man gone . . . dead, perhaps? Nobody knew really.

Bye and bye spring would come. The snow would disappear and life would burst forth once more from the slumbering blackness of the earth. Seeds would sprout. . . . Could she bear this onrush of the urge for creation . . . alone? Vaguely her thoughts raced toward big Samson. "No," she said to herself. "No, I'm a decent woman and I have my children to think of." Work, that's what she needed! She reëntered the house and grabbed a red mantle from the back of a chair, threw it over her head and drew it tight beneath her strong chin.

Without a word to little Marie, still huddled over the fire, she went out again and hurried toward the stable. She would work . . . shoveling dung, shovelling like a man, sweating . . . to sweat the hotness out of her, working beside the dumb beasts!

In her haste her thigh bumped against the sleigh left in the barn-yard, sturdy, low-slung, painted a gay, laughing blue; a blue that was ribald and hurt the eyes, when the sun shone upon it. She noticed that Henri had forgotten to take the bear-skin robe into the house. Did he want the dogs to maul it? Careless one! So? She was the house-wife after all, with the interests of her home at heart.

But just as she entered the stable she caught sight of Joseph on snow-shoes, up there on the hillside, striding home with his two dogs. His gun rested on his shoulder and he carried a brace of rabbits. Grotesque, blue shadows slunk ahead of him and descended over the brow of the hill. Ah, Joseph, why must she see him now? Morose one, silently accusing, growing every day more like his father! His fur cap stuck cautiously out of the shell of his sheepskin coat, like a turtle's head, peering here and

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there . . . furtively . . . ready to withdraw at the slightest provocation. Her enemy, Joseph . . . and her son.

Oh, they were growing away from her, the children! They had forgotten that her milk had nurtured them . . . all but 'tit François, whom she cherished each night, close to her body. And only last night he had broken away from her embrace to murmur sleepily, "Don't . . . you choke me."

She rushed into the stable and grabbed a pitch-fork and thrust it deep into the steaming pile of ordure, throwing it over her shoulder, out of the narrow window. But Joseph had seen her . . . and another . . . Henri. What was *he* doing, lurking here in the shadows? They were all watching her!

"Here . . . let me!" he said. "I was just about to do that myself!"

"No, I will! I want to do something. Go! Go! Take the horse and hasten down to the settlement. I want . . . coffee . . . I want. . . ." She would be rid of him! Why must he remind her of her duty to the man she supposed was dead? The man who had gone away and left her?

"But, no, I just bought some. . . ."

"Do as I tell you. . . ."

"To-morrow . . . perhaps, when I go down with the cheese. . . ."

"Now!" she blazed forth.

Henri obeyed. As he loosened the halter of the black horse and backed him out of his stall, he kept grumbling to himself, but Marie pretended not to hear.

"Oh, this silence . . . this sly silence, and all the time glaring at me as if it is my fault that those two return not!" she brooded, as she completed her task and turned toward the cows, tethered in the adjoining stalls. "*Dieu!* It's as if my own flesh had turned against me . . . sons and daughters alike!" Marie held her breath and listened for the screech of the runners over the snow. The stallion, keyed up by the sharpness of the air, drew back his pendulant lip and whinnied . . . a weird scream, which split the stillness and tortured the ear with its fragments of sound. It stirred her curiously. She threw aside her pitch-fork.

"Well . . . I'll go! That's what I'll do . . . I'll teach them!" she said. "I'll get my shawl and go," but instead she hailed Joseph who was just entering the yard. "Give me your coat and the snow-shoes."

"I thought I'd dress the hares," he evaded her request.

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Did he suspect? "Dress them in the shed. Give me the coat and shoes."

"Where are you going at this time of day?" he demanded, making no move to comply with her command.

"Off over the fields . . . to the woods perhaps . . . what business . . .?"

"It'll soon grow dark," he said with finality, and moved away. "Where's that Henri? Where's the sleigh? Did you send him . . .?"

Marie grabbed him by the arm, then brought the palm of her other hand with a resounding slap across his face. "Insolent one! You are not master here . . . not yet! 'T is well to remember! Give me the coat!"

"You . . . you . . .!" snarled Joseph, and his breath came sobbing through his clenched teeth. "Take care what you do . . . and Father gone!" he blubbered, but he handed her the coat and kicked off the shoes.

"Get into the house! Go, clean your dead rabbits . . . you white-livered brat!" she hissed, and pushed her arms into the sleeves, warm animal-hide against her chilled shoulders. Awkwardly she adjusted the skis, and without another word strode off over the rise.

Joseph watched her as she lowered the bars and passed on into the north meadow. He wiped his eyes on his shirt-sleeve and wandered unhappily into the shed, where Lucie met him. "Couldn't you stop her? Why couldn't you stop her . . . no knowing. . ."

"No," he answered brutally. "Stop your bawling!"

Marie felt the icy wind cooling her hot cheeks. . . . She shouldn't have hit Joseph! Through the sudden gloom she could discern the dim outlines of the old, white mare, standing disconsolately, with her head supported on the top-rail. A ghost of a horse against the black mountains. The sight of her made Marie feel both very old and very young . . . this ancient bag of bones, which had been a part of her dot, and even then not a colt. Marie-Blanche took time to shoo her gently through the gate into the barnyard, before she replaced the bars and plodded on, over the hill, picking her way around dead stumps, on to the line of timber, and beyond into the depths of the forest. Straight ahead, straight as a homing bird flies . . . and before she knew it to the very door of a trapper's cot. . . . Samson's crude shelter! There she paused . . . out of breath . . . afraid . . . ashamed.

"Who goes there?" bawled a voice from within.

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"Me . . . Marie . . . Marie-Blanche," and her breath came spasmodically through parched lips. Crazy fool, what had she done? Her blood rushed to her throat, choking her. Still she stood there, panting and staring . . . numbly at space . . . at the pale ribbon of smoke which curled from the chimney and lost itself in the deep blue atmosphere. It was dark now . . . almost . . . and the night about her held innumerable terrors . . . eyes, voices, faint whisperings of wild things. Menacing night! And the only comfort a feeble light which shone from his window! Feet shuffled clumsily within the shanty, and Samson flung wide the door, and let it sag back on its leather hinges.

"Ah . . . *toi!*" he roared. "At last . . . Marie," and he screwed his ugly mug into lines of jovial laughter. His great jowls trembled. "Well?"

"It's me. I came," she acknowledged weakly. "I came to see if perhaps there were wintergreens. . . ."

"Ho! Ho! Wintergreens . . .!" He laughed incredulously.

"I thought," she began lamely, then suddenly afraid for herself, she burst forth, "Ah, I must be getting back! . . . But perhaps I can warm myself by your fire first. . . ."

"It will be hard going back . . . in the dark," he said insinuatingly. "Come in and sit down. How did you know I was here?"

"I thought you'd come up to tend your traps . . . I. . . ."

"In the dark?"

"Well . . .," Marie-Blanche lowered her eyes.

"It's you that's uneasy, woman . . . uneasy without your man . . . your little Pierre . . . the runt, Grenon!" he roared. "Why did you ever marry him? And now you come to me. . . . Ho! Ho-o-oo!"

Marie looked about her uneasily . . . at the rough table and bench; at the pallet, mussed up, and piled with bear-skins, in the corner by the hearth. She shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps . . .," she admitted. "But, I do not miss him . . . not now. . . ." She looked back at Samson and smiled invitingly, and her cheeks went hot.

"Perhaps you will not miss him . . . you and I, *Grand' Marie*. . . . Eh? Samson, the man's man and a woman's man, too. . . ."

"I must go!" she cried, again alarmed at the mad pounding of her heart.

"Then . . . what did you come for . . . to feast your eyes?"

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Why?" and he grabbed her by the skirt. "Stay! . . . Stay with me, Marie, and you shall see. We'll feast on bear-meat first . . . and look you! Bagosse! That will warm your blood . . .!"

"You and your bagosse!" she giggled, and the image of the insignificant jug she had given Pierre on that day of his departure came for an instant before her eyes. "Well . . . give it here. I'll try some of it. *Ciel!* It burns . . . like liquid fire . . . never was bagosse like that . . .!"

In the night Marie woke and thought she felt the sweet warmth of 'tit François's body by her side. Blindly she hugged him close, before she thought, and was rewarded by a comfortable, bass grunt. Samson, not François! Her thoughts came tumbling back to her, pell-mell . . . doubt, fear, the agony of remorse . . . which resolved gradually into mild regret; then content, for was not to-night to-night, and to-morrow another matter, which would take care of itself, as to-morrows do?

She knew vaguely that soon she would have to return to the bread-baking, to the cooking; to the smells of the barnyard, to the milking, with her head pressed close to the warm, palpitating belly of the beast. In the autumn . . . her mind raced on . . . there would be the slaughtering of the hogs and the drip-drip of their blood into earthen bowls . . . steam rising; foam bubbling. She shut her eyes. Why recall this now . . . this sight which she had always witnessed with perfect equanimity? She forced her mind to travel on to the springtime. The snow would disappear, and again she would watch sleighs driving over the cracking ice, hastening ahead of the widening fissures, barely gaining the opposite shore before the ice would heave, and the water groan and wake to terrific life, as she had waked this night. Ice-cakes piling up and water rushing over them; sleighs caught in the maelstrom. She had seen this happen more than once. And after the ice had gone out . . . wind . . . and rain . . . and the first flowers of spring. She turned over and slept.

At last, pale dawn slid coldly through the single window. Marie woke with a start. It was day . . . another day, and how was she to account to them for her absence? The enormity of her transgression suddenly burst upon her, pouring like a flood-tide of shame over her satiated body. She raised herself on her elbow and gazed down at the man beside her . . . ugly in the meagre light, his face as rugged as the Laurentides and without their primeval beauty.

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She rose cautiously, lest she rouse Samson, drew her coat about her and opened the door. Violet shadows lingered in the depths of the forest, as she hurried past. The wilderness had reclaimed her, its primitive woman. The aroma of pine blew with the keen wind across her face, laving her in its cleanness.

She shuddered in ecstasy, then threw back her head and laughed madly, and, hidden behind a tree, the hunchback, Barnabé, Coli's brother, watched her, smiling his cunning smile. So? She had been this night with Samson . . . Coli's Grande Marie? He must run to tell Coli, who was already at work in the forest, marking trees against to-day's devastation. Coli was jealous of Samson. He had missed his chance, but his time would yet come, if Barnabé could arrange it.

Unaware of Barnabé's presence, Marie hastened on, her feet slightly swollen beneath the thongs of the snow-shoes. Clouds spread in strata, fan-wise across the zenith, from the west. As she descended the slope, ending in her own yard, she felt relieved that her journey was over and she had reached home undetected. "A storm comes," she prophesied idly, watching the smoke pouring horizontally from her chimney. "More snow . . . what with the smoke falling, and fingers of cloud stretching from the west." It reminded her of the storm brewing within her breast, which last night had broken loose and destroyed her in its fury.

A smart wind swayed the drooping arms of the conifers and whipped her heavy skirts about her, as she walked on, more slowly now, for she was loath to enter the forbidding silence of the house. She paused a moment by the bars, and saw Joseph come out and run across the yard to the stable. So early? Well, she was ready for breakfast. Lucie opened the door and called, and Joseph answered her. . . . Marie couldn't hear what they said. Then Henri emerged from the stable, carrying two pails of milk . . . then Joseph again . . . then Pierre. A short parade of industry. Perhaps they had not missed her? Folly! But, yes. . . . Well, she would tell them that she had been lost in the woods and was obliged to seek shelter until daylight came.

She lifted the rails and passed through, her clothing catching on a dried bramble. For an instant it recalled the hands of Samson, tugging at her skirt. "I won't," she whispered softly. "I won't again." She hurried across the intervening space, driving away the sentimental, old mare, who worried her sleeve with slobbering

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lips. Ah . . . the ancient ghost of last night had become the doddering reality of to-day!

"Go away!" she cried petulantly, but the old thing chose to be coquettish and followed her up to the door, whence she wheeled and galloped across the yard to a pile of straw.

CHAPTER XXIV

MARIE fingered the knob. Why did they remain under cover like frightened mice? Were they afraid of her, after last night, or were they waiting to fall upon her? She entered, and there they sat, eating. She sniffed the air hungrily, then turned to face the tribunal. Lucie's eyes met hers briefly, and she noticed that the girl had been weeping, and now tears welled up again, close to the surface. How easily the child wept!

Joseph stared at his mother's tousled hair, and quickly her guilty hands flew to pat the stray locks in place. "The wind," she murmured and laughed self-consciously.

"Oh, the wind?" said Henri, scowling, while Joseph and the others continued to stare like idiots.

"Where you been, Maman?" asked François, and without waiting for her to answer, blurted out his news, "Marie . . . she's awful sick . . . all night. She most died, she did!"

"My 'tite Marie? Oh, no . . . no!" begged Marie dully, staring at Lucie . . . at Henri . . . at Joseph, in turn, pleading for their denial, forgetting the lie she would tell them.

"But, yes," answered Lucie quietly. "She has a fever and is out of her head."

"Ah . . . me, I will make her well!" Young fools, what did they know about illness? What did they know about anything?"

"We eat early so that Joseph may go for the doctor."

"Doctor? I am her mother. I can make her well!" she repeated loudly.

"The doctor . . . or maybe . . . better the priest," Lucie continued slowly.

"The priest? So?" Marie's face paled. She threw off her coat. "Where is she? Where is my child? Why aren't you doing something for her?"

"In there . . . but she will not know you. What are you going to do?" Lucie questioned, blocking the way.

"Stand aside, Lucie," Marie insisted, at once resuming the helm.

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"She was cold . . . so cold," Lucie whimpered.

"I know . . . I should have known yesterday," Marie faltered. Punishment . . . and so soon? "Cold, but I thought. . . . Why did you not bring her near the fire?"

"She went to bed and slept . . . there by my side . . . then in the middle of the night she woke and screamed . . . not like a scream either, but muffled and hoarse. She choked! It scared me. We didn't think to move her. . . ."

"Ah . . . so? The croup . . . that's what she has! 'Tis well. . . . You had me frightened. But such a great big girl to have the croup! See, *mignonne*, *Maman* comes!" But the dull eyes and blue face struck terror to Marie's heart. "Oh, no . . . no, my *tite Marie* . . . come back. . . ."

"We did all we could . . . all we know how to do. I heated stones for her feet, and Joseph gave her hot water with a *bagosse* in it." So? *Bagosse*? Foul *bagosse*, and see what it had brought her . . . ruin last night, and death to her child!

"Get the w'iskey!"

"There is none left."

"Send Henri to the settlement. No, you, Joseph! Joseph, hear me! Go to Samson's hut . . ." she breathed heavily. "You know?" She met his eyes without flinching. She must save the girl, never mind what they thought of her! "Go to Samson . . . he is nearer. He has w'iskey. Tell him I must have it. *Vite!*" She turned away from the malice in his eyes.

"How do you know . . .?" Joseph began. "So? I'll stay here."

"Go . . . Henri! Do as I tell you!" she cried frantically. "Go for the w'iskey, Henri!" she commanded her third son.

"Stay! I'll go!" cried Joseph. "I'll go myself. Do not send the boy!"

"*Eh, bien*. Now, you, Lucie, heat me some hog's fat."

All through the morning Marie fought for the life of her child. Disturbing thoughts came and went, as she watched the girl struggling for breath . . . that joyful, singing throat in the cold clutch of death. Subconsciously she felt life moving about her; Lucie coming and going, quietly efficient; Henri tending the chores; Pierre and François, scared and silent, crouching in one corner of the kitchen; then Samson, loud-mouthed and masterful; Joseph, morose, accusing. Bold and smiling, Samson made no secret of

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his victory, but he proved wonderfully gentle as he forced hot liquor down the child's throat.

They all stood around and watched her, scarcely daring to breathe, lest the sound frighten away her thin thread of life. Tite Marie choked, the obstruction moved and she seemed more at ease. She slept, while Marie watched, watched until her vision grew suddenly dim and her head drooped above the sleeping girl. She felt Samson's breath, hot against her neck, and pushed him away, and braced her head on her arm, and watched. . . .

Sometime later she was conscious of a whispered conversation between brother and sister, and then of Joseph, rushing out and driving the sleigh swiftly down the road, the stallion's hoofs throwing aside clods of snow and frozen earth. Marie got up and moved toward the window. There was the ancient mare, like the transmigrant soul of some poor Cassandra, gazing forlornly after them. She whinnied shrilly as they passed from sight. The mother shivered, recalling yesterday and last night . . . the old mare ghastly against the evening sky, and she had made her irrevocable mistake. "So?" she sighed sadly. "So Joseph has gone for the priest?"

Marie crossed herself. She would not give up . . . not yet! She thought to pray, but words stuck in her throat and died, still-born. Ah, her sins were there, between her and God! "I'm her mother, Christ," she whispered humbly. "Little Jesus? Mother Marie . . . you will understand . . . intercede for me . . . for me . . . for *her*, if not for me! But let her live and I will sin no more. . . ."

Lucie tugged at her sleeve. "She won't live, think you?"

"She'll live!" growled Samson. "I've seen many a jack in my day took worse an' seen 'im pull through. Give the w'iskey a chance. I've pulled 'em through with w'iskey, myself!" he boasted, but his anxious looks belied his words. Such a little thing to lie there and die!

Marie-Blanche said nothing, but prayed in her heart, "Please, Mother Marie. . . ."

The wind whipped the trees to fury, wailing while it whirled like a maenad over the lake, etching mad patterns in the snow-dust. It howled a winter-lament, and above it Marie thought she heard chapel-bells. She hoped the priest would come soon! Again the wind! She should have urged Joseph to go before!

Out in the yard the oldest hound cocked his head, listened, then

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stretched his neck till his nose pointed sky-ward, and bayed. The younger dog followed suit, howling a full fortissimo. Samson flung the door open and threw a chuck of stove-wood, missing the beasts by several feet. They ran, but faced about at some distance and barked furiously, before they slunk off behind the barns. They were Joseph's dogs . . . and Pierre's. He had been their god and master, before he had left. This Samson was too officious! Marie-Blanche thought so, too . . . after what had happened yesterday. So long ago! Her freedom? Ah, it had become her burden!

Would Joseph never come?

The darkness fell and Lucie lighted the candles. Sleet hit the window-panes, like icy fingers of Death tapping to summon the soul of 'tite Marie. "Mother Marie . . . hear!" pleaded Grande-Marie, her hands pressed to her bosom, her eyes shut to keep back the tears. "Hear me!" Through the veil which blotted out sensation, she knew that it would be difficult for Joseph driving back against the biting wind and sleet. "St. Christophe, bring Joseph back to me . . . safe. I want him . . . Holy Saint!"

Samson sat by the fire and dozed, and above the wailing of the wind Marie could hear him snoring. Stop him . . . somebody! "Henri," she called sharply. "Drive the old mare into her stall before she freezes!"

"God 'a mercy on man and beast," yawned Samson, waking up with a start.

"I put her in already," said Henri. "But now I go to feed the beasts," and he tramped out in his father's great boots, Pierre and François following, the little one clinging for comfort with his raw, red fist to the elder brother's pant-leg.

In a wave of maternal agony, Marie told herself she must grease his small paws, so chapped from his play in the snow. *Dieu!* She had neglected him! Bad woman!

Little Marie stirred and groaned, and for an instant opened her eyes. A quiver passed the length of her body . . . then she closed her eyes again.

Dieu!

"*Dieu, merci!* She sleeps," whispered Lucie and wept.

"No, my child . . . no . . . she's dead," said Marie gently. "Dead . . . dead . . . my 'tite Marie," she repeated in a dull monotone. Then she shrieked, "Dead! My Marie . . . my baby . . . ! Mother Marie . . . why?" And she flung herself on her knees.

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"What? What?" shouted Samson, jumping up and standing, like a Gargantua, in his wool socks. "She sleeps . . . perhaps."

"Dead! Feel her heart."

He nodded solemnly, crossed himself, and drew Marie-Blanche to her feet, almost smothering her in his bear-like embrace. "Don't weep, my Marie! There'll be others to take her place . . . yours and mine," he tried to soothe her, burying his lips in her hair.

"No one," sobbed Marie, beating his chest, his arms, his face. "Keep away from me! Do you hear? Keep away!" she moaned, as she stared into Lucie's stricken face. "I killed her . . . I . . . who gave her life. . . ."

Samson looked at her in amazement. He blew his nose noisily and grumbled, "Well, I'll be off to my shanty . . . out of your way, before the storm gets worse. You'll be coming for me again . . . some day, my Marie . . . when you want me. You can't do without me." He pulled on his boots and drew on his fur jacket, opened the door and glanced out, then he closed the door again firmly. "I'll stay the night," he decided, pulling off his jacket. "Go, get some food, my girl," he directed Lucie. "We shall feel better, if we eat."

Marie-Blanche sat, crouched over her knees, brooding. Tears ravished her features, digging deep furrows in her cheeks. Occasionally she raised her eyes to watch Lucie, placing candles at the head of small Marie's cot; folding the small hands across the flat chest; combing out the tangled hair. Again, with the short-bladed hog-scraper, chipping off frozen slices of venison into the skillet.

"Take care . . . you'll cut your fingers!" cautioned Samson.

The girl gazed at him malevolently, then at the short blade.

Marie roused herself. "Here, Lucie," she offered. "You sit . . . sit by *her* awhile, and let me cook supper.

"No, I want to. I want something to do. . . ."

Marie relaxed again into her chair. All night beside the stiffening body, and Joseph and the priest came not. Suppose Joseph had not reached the priest . . . suppose . . .? Lucie sent the boys to bed, then after a time went herself, leaving the two alone together, Marie-Blanche and Samson, seated on opposite sides of the birch-wood blaze, where Pierre had sat with the Indian woman, so long ago. Marie stared at the fire and Samson stared at Marie. Only once did he reach over and place his broad palm tentatively

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upon her knee, whether to console her or to importune her, she did not know.

"Keep away," she murmured, as if from habit. In the next room she could hear Lucie weeping softly. Above the child's bier, the clean, yellow flames burned bravely, slanting slightly in the draught. She wished fire could enter her soul and burn out the sin . . . and sear the bleeding scars.

Early in the morning, Joseph returned with the Father. "We couldn't get through the storm last night," he explained. "We stayed the night at Pierre Duval's . . . after the horse went lame. Once I lost the way . . . and slept. . . ." Joseph's drawn face reflected the terror he had experienced.

"It's too late . . . now," sighed his mother.

Joseph looked at the priest. "We did all we could. . . ."

"My daughter . . . my children," the pastor said sweetly.

"I want to talk to him alone! Go . . . all of you, and leave us!" Marie cried, and while they filed out, she remained at the window, gazing out upon the crystal glory. Ice on mountain and valley, coating the trees with gems, dazzling in the sunlight. Little Marie had gone like the Snow Maiden into the brittle domain of Death.

CHAPTER XXV

ASAPH disposed of his cargo, when prices were at their peak, and received his pay in good, yellow gold. He drew a long breath when his boats were tied up at Shady Side, and looked forward to a snug winter, after a busy season. He paid off his men and offered them the use of the boats for winter-quarters, provided they were willing to chop wood for the fires and help with the necessary re-conditioning.

Lem had a sister in Haverstraw and he would pay her a visit later on. Lancy always left as soon as they tied up, for his soul hankered for the gay, white lights of the city. Everybody knew him and it was easy to pick up odd coins, playing the piano in cheap music-halls downtown; and he lived on location, so to speak. He urged Andrew and Jean to join him. It was a good way to learn New York, he said. All the big fighters and promoters frequented these places of entertainment and he knew them all well enough to address them by their nicknames. He would see to it that Jean met just the right fellows.

But Andrew demurred, for some unknown reason. He would accept Billings' offer, and later on, if he and Jean got tired of it, perhaps they would pick up something to do around the docks or freight-yards. What was the hurry? Jean was still a kid. Perhaps Andrew was beginning to feel that the boy was a white elephant on his hands, and that he was safer here at Shady Side than in the big city. Jean was such a fool about women, too!

Adam was only too glad to stay on the lemon-squeezer. The city attracted him less, if any, than the open country, where you might see your man coming a mile off and get out of his way. In the city enemies could hang out anywhere and burst upon you before you knew it! Besides it was so comfortable here by the fire. He took so little interest in life, it was as if he were already dead, Lancy concluded, yet cheating death, which certainly would have claimed him, could it have located him among the crowds thronging the earth's surface. Adam was safe enough here, hiding among the house-boats and barges and shanties, like a water-

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rat. These water-squatters asked few questions, because so many among them had something to hide.

Jean soon grew restless. For a while he was happy enough, prowling around Shady Side, talking, laughing and drinking, and engaging in friendly bouts. The Nellie Z was tied up not 500 feet away, and he and Jessie strolled along the water's edge, under the eagle eye of Brigid. He told her grand tales of the lake country, about 'tite Marie and Lucienne . . . about his fine mother . . . a grand woman! . . . and the whole brood of brothers and sisters, growing up on the borders of the wilderness . . . of his father and the fishing-trip. One day he even told her of his desertion of the Towman . . . a grand boat, she was, too! Jessie looked worried. She told him primly that he must go back sometime . . . then she wept a little and clung to him tenaciously, with her small, brown hands, as if she wouldn't let him go . . . not without her.

"I won't," he assured her. "Not till I make big money . . . much gold . . . and take them all presents." He laughed gaily.

"Oh, that will be a long time. . . ."

"Money to jingle in my pockets. . . ."

"Take me with you . . . then?" she pleaded.

"Sure! We get married . . . see?" But Jean didn't know when. That would require more money, he thought.

Lancy took Jean and Jessie on an excursion to Castle Garden, and, hand in hand, their eyes grew dreamy; and ever and again they saw the wide expanse of the gray-green ocean . . . always the sea and far-off lands and distant waters beckoning. Beckoning Jean? Jessie recognized the yearning in his eyes and clung to him, but Jean went on dreaming. He would see the world before he returned to the forest. Perhaps in the spring, who knew? He would ship aboard a clipper headed 'round the Horn . . . or a steamer going somewhere. He wasn't going to stay forever on a tow, dependent upon the moods of a lazy mule or a dirty tug, and withal so lousy slow she was more than like to freeze herself in the sluggish water of the canal. Then in the winter, look you . . . digging herself in, like a hibernating beast! He was sick of it! Why hadn't he gone already to some foreign land . . .? Why hadn't he followed the sun in its course . . .? Why . . . ?

"Come on, Lancy says we must be goin'," urged Jessie.

Jean faced about reluctantly. He was bored; that was certain.

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Once back at Shady Side he forgot his ennui. It was jolly strolling over to the Nellie Z for a chat, and here he got to know Bull better. He was not such a bad sort after all . . . a stupid person, stubborn as a mule, too, but not often really cruel, and Jean admired his exaggerated sense of loyalty to the awkward barge, Nellie Z. She was beautiful in his eyes . . . she was Bull's woman. Willingly Bull taught Jean all he knew about fighting, not a little elated because he was fooling Lem and Andrew. In Bull's company he passed the short hours of the day, and during the long, dark evenings, squatting beside a smoking oil-lamp, Bull regaled the boy with tales about women. He told Jean more than he had ever known and aroused his curiosity. Not that Jean was losing his innate chivalry, but he was learning to place the Diadamas, the Louettas and the black Molls in their proper categories. Now, Jessie was different! She was as sweet and modest as a wood violet.

The first of December brought Maggie and Casey in the mud-colored boat, and Maggie dragged Jean off to his first mass since he left Canada. He was glad Jessie was there, for it made the vast interior seem more friendly. He watched her sitting there quietly beside Brigid, and later he got up, when she got up, and tagged close at her heels, kneeling with her when she performed her devotions.

Not to be outdone by Maggie, whom he hated, Bull took the boy to his first dime-show. Dressed in their eccentric best, the two giants swung down a crowded side-walk in the Bowery. Passers-by gave them a wide berth, after one comprehending glance at Jean's height and the terrifying breadth of Bull's shoulders. Even the clouded minds of the perennial inebriates seemed to harbor a subconscious respect for such massive strength, and after awhile the jeering, admiring crew of gamins, who had followed close at their heels, fell away, bent on easier prey.

Passing Chatham Square, they approached a gaudy façade, upon which were depicted in lurid colors and strange perspectives, the curiosities within . . . the fat lady billowing pinkly above her chair; the living skeleton, knock-kneed in his blue tights; the bearded lady; the lion-faced boy; the ape-man; the beautiful snake-charmer; and the pituitary monstrosities, a giant, who balanced Prince Rollo, a midget, on one, great hand.

"Come on! Let's go in!" cried Jean.

"But . . . a little further on . . ." protested Bull.

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"Naw . . . here . . .!"

The interior was ablaze with gas-lights, the like of which Jean had never seen. Over in a corner a near-sighted German, who had known better days, was banging out popular tunes on a cracked piano, but Bull yanked Jean toward the freaks. The fat lady's eyes were heavy with sleep, and she mopped her perspiring neck with a bit of silk handkerchief. The snake-charmer proved to be a bedraggled female in yellow satin, bushy, red petticoats showing beneath her tinselled skirts. High-heeled boots of red morocco crept up her silk-stockinged legs, and a paper rose snuggled in her hair. She wound the drugged python about her shoulders and waist, and kissed its ugly head. How brave she was!

The ape-man sat scowling in his corner and the pasty-faced dwarf yawned, as he stood beside a great, empty chair, and sold tin-tyes of himself for a dime. Automatically the sword-swallower relaxed his throat, and blades of kitchen-knives and hog-scrapers disappeared from view, only to be drawn forth and wiped upon a red-bordered towel.

Everywhere Jean looked there was something marvelous to see. Over there, within a roped-off space, two muscular females were engaged in a walking contest. They wore singular costumes of plush, the bodices cut low, and the short trunks gilt-fringed above plump thighs . . . one in green, the other in purple, and bystanders, who had placed their bets, called out lewdly, "Hey, you, Greeny, I'm bettin' on ye . . ." or "My money an' my heart's on ye, Vi'let. How's fer a date? Soon 'is is over, ha?" as they swilled their beer. Jean entered into the spirit of the contest at once, but Bull passed on to the next exhibit.

"Say, wheres the gi'nt ye a'vertise? Where is he?" he asked suddenly. "I paid my money to see the gi'nt an' I'm goin' to see 'im!" Bull had taken a couple of whiskeys and was growing belligerent. "Hey, bring on yer gi'nt, or look out fer trouble! If I get real mad, I'll bust up yer joint!" Petrified, the walkers stood still in their tracks, and the snake-charmer, sensing excitement, uncoiled her serpent and put him in his basket, fastening down the lid. The ape-man ceased scowling and looked alive. "Come on, Johnny, let's we rush the place!"

"Why . . . no," Jean objected.

"Come on, I tell ye. Let's have some fun!"

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"Fer Gaw's sake, somebody call Al!" shouted the skeleton. "Al, here's a upstate bum makin' a fuss!"

A burly individual parted the heavy curtains which separated the museum from the saloon proper, and came in. He pushed his derby forward over one lack-lustre eye, and worked his mouth around his black stogy, until the pomaded points of his moustache tickled his cheek-bones. "Say . . ." he drawled. "What's all the row about?" The skeleton merely jerked his lean thumb toward Bull, who was commencing to weave from one foot to the other, his long arms swinging with his peculiar gait. "So 'tis you, ha, makin' a fuss? Thought ye was a goriller. Shut up now, or git out!"

"An' who's goin' to put me out?"

"Why . . . me! I'm the boss here! Get me gloves, Ed," Al swaggered. "Say, Green-horn, see them notches on the door-post? Know what they means? I got me man ev'ry time, that's what!" he continued, as he drew on one pair of gloves and the assistant threw the others to Bull.

Seldom had Bull encountered an opponent so eager for battle. Besides he didn't know how to fight with gloves, so he stood fingering them awkwardly, trying to collect his wits. "Gimme time to get my second," he parried. "Hey, Johnny, come here!"

"Comin'!" called Jean, rushing across the room, colliding with eager spectators, who squawked and leapt out of his way. By the back of his collar, he carried the half-strangled midget. "Bull . . . look! *Regardez!* See me!" and he carefully balanced the midget on his hands. "Haw! Haw!" he yelled in mirth.

"Fer Gawd's sake what've ye got there?" growled Bull.

The boss stared, doubting the tangibility of the phenomenon revealed to him. Truly a giant!

Bull saw his chance. "Wanna fight *him?*?" he inquired wryly.

"Fer the love o' Mike, where'd he come from?"

"He's me body-guard," Bull drawled, hitching up his trousers.

Al sighed, straightened his derby and threw aside his gloves. "You win! Say, let's come to terms. Franco, our giant was took sick at his stummick las' week. That's why he ain't here. Will ye let the kid take his place? Will ye? I'll pay him well . . . an' hire you, too. . . . What can you do?"

"Me? I can break a man's back with me two bare hands," Bull bragged. "But I don't need no job. I just come off the canal."

"You'll need money 'fore spring . . . it's long time off. You'll

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make a good strong man. Abie, bring them tights and the leopard-skin."

"Boss, them tights is tore somethin' terrible."

"Never mind. We'll paint his skin through the holes."

"I don't want no job," declared Bull. "But the kid can try it for to-night."

"All right by me," said Al.

"Bull . . . see!" Jean had picked up one of Al's gloves, fitting it over his huge fist and punching it tentatively. He pulled it off and extricated a horse-shoe. "Bull . . . *regardez!*" he laughed joyously.

Bull snorted and spat upon his hands. Al guffawed. "No harm done," said he placatingly. "Ye see how 'tis . . . I aim to land a knock-out blow, then they'll be no come-back. See? An' when they wake up down there," he jerked his thumb toward the cellar," why, they don't know what's happened."

"Ye bet . . . I'm on," said Bull, quite convinced. "An' I s'pose the cellar leads natural to the river?"

"Well, they do say they's river-rats down there," admitted Al.

Jean was inducted into the position of impersonator of the absent giant and a very special cow-boy's suit was provided for him, something gloriously western, according to Al's point of view, including ten-gallon hat, chaps and high-heeled boots, which added inches to the boy's six-feet-five. Jean placed himself before the gaudy mural of the mesa, with horsemen chasing Indians in the distance . . . and a coiled rattlesnake in the foreground.

When he arrived home early the next morning, he found Andrew waiting for him. "Where've ye been?" he demanded. "I been waitin' up fer ye. Ye went off with Bull, I know. Thought I told ye to stay clear o' him?"

"I got me a job," declared Jean. "Listen. . . ."

"Ye listen to me! I ain't goin' to stay here worryin' about ye . . . an' havin' Mis' Billin's worry neither. . . ."

"But, yes, I got a job," reiterated the boy.

"The hell! What kind of a job?"

"Me'n Bull. . . ."

"I told ye to keep away from him!"

"He ain't there. He don't like it."

"Must be rotten if he don't like it," remarked Lancy, who had come down for over Sunday. "Where're ye at anyhow? Down to the docks?"

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"I'm workin' at Al's place. I get money an' mebbe Jessie an' me, we get married soon. See?"

"Who says so? Who's Al anyhow?"

"Not Al Keough? That ol' ferrit?" asked Lancy.

"Al . . . that's his name."

"A dime-museum an' saloon, with a lot o' easy dames! What're ye doin' there? Bar-keep or bouncer?"

"I knew if I took my eyes offn him fer more'n two minutes, he'd go sneakin' off with that murd'rer!"

"What are ye doin' at Al's place, I asked ye?" demanded Lancy.

"Me? I'm the gi'nt . . . big feller. . . ."

"Gi'nt? Gi'nt? What's that?"

"Big feller . . . wears a big hat . . . big heels to his shoes . . . an' I sit an' hold a little feller on my hand . . . so . . . an' sell pitchers. . . ."

"Gawd save me! He's the big freak in a freak-show! Haw! Haw! Haw. . . . Har-r-r!" Lancy leaned weakly against the cabin-door. "Don't never worry none about him, Andy. He always lands on his feet. Al ain't such a bad sort, at that . . . an' as fer the dames, they's so many of 'em, they won't do him no harm. They's safety in numbers."

CHAPTER XXVI

ALL through the winter Jean stuck to his profession, returning to Shady Side and Jessie as often as his long hours would permit. By the first of March the bold excitement of it began to pall. He had come to know the frowzy show-people all too well . . . poor, worn-out victims of love, some still rather young, many very old; derelicts, who drifted in timidly to warm themselves and get a free drink and hand-out. Sharpers there were, both male and female; and a fat, old drunk, who snivelled over the foaming stein Al prepared for her, no matter what the time of night, no matter what the weather. People whispered that she was his mother, but all took care not to say so within his hearing.

Prize-fighters in the full bloom of their popularity; prize-fighters already skidding toward oblivion and hanging on like grim death, hoping their rotten hearts would hold out until they could stage a come-back; others of them frankly begging. Promoters always on the alert for fresh material. Ugly brutes from the docks, who got fresh, with a bit of liquor under their belts, and had to be bounced. Jean enjoyed that. Rival gangs, who stood for no fooling and had to be handled with gloves . . . gun-toters . . . but it was all the same, even to the dead man found on the doorstep in the cold, gray dawn; and the noodles and their swell girls from uptown, who came slumming.

Caught off their guard, the freaks turned sour and indulged in senseless bickering. In the acid glare of the gas-lights their yellow skin, tired eyes and tarnished lips were exaggerated. Often Jean felt like rushing out into the night and walking and walking until he came to the river and mountains, there to fill his lungs with fresh, keen air . . . anything to blot out the reek of whiskey and stale tobacco and human smells, ill-concealed by cheap perfumes and hair-oils.

Day by day, he watched the younger women staring at the sloppy, old street-walker, huddled in her thin, black coat, and, catching a glimpse of themselves in the mirror of the future, they shivered and drank deep.

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During dull hours the freaks relaxed into the more natural of their dual personalities. The human skeleton sparred bitterly with his wife, the fat lady, and she, poor thing, too dull-witted to send back a quick retort, drank herself into somnolence, calling for Picardy rum so long as her lips could frame the word. The sword-swallower amused himself by hurling opprobrious innuendoes at the snake-charmer, who had been his mistress three years back. Blandly she took from her pocket the muffler which she was knitting for Al, who might have been her man, had the Gods been kind . . . and she younger. The bearded lady added a touch of rouge to her glittering make-up; and Jean rode the midget on his knee. Always the same, when the excitement of the moment was gone, and they fell under the spell of the "black-dog."

"I'm through," Jean announced to Al one day.

"Gettin' uneasy, hey?" queried the other. "It's spring-fever, that's all. Stick 'er out fer a while. You'll get over this. An', kid, it's easy money. . . ."

"I think I go up the river an stay with the folks again. . . ."

"What d'ye want aroun' them stinkin', ol' boats? Stay here an' mebbe I'll let ye run the place this summer."

"I go back to the boats. I want to see Andy . . . an' Lance . . . an' Lem. Two weeks now since I see Jessie. I go up the river bye'n bye an' see the men from the Lakes an' Mississipp'. Mebbe I go to sea. . . ."

"Ya-ah, ye're homesick fer yer Mama!"

"No . . . I go back there . . . sometime, but not till I make money. See?"

"Ye won't make much on the canal. Ye're makin' more here."

"I want to smell the water again. Anyway I go back to Shady Side an' see 'em to-day. Mebbe I come back if they ain't ready . . . mebbe I get married."

"Take my advice, kid, an' don't get tied to no girl at your age!"

"Well, here ye be at last!" shouted Andrew, as Jean hove in sight. "I was just thinkin' o' lookin' ye up myself . . . mebbe to-morrer. Ye got a letter. See?"

"Letter?"

"It's been all over an' finally turned up here. I'd a brung it to ye, only we're alone here, an' Adam's so poorly. Lem don't get back from his sister's till to-morrer, an' the Billin'ses is in Philadelph'y. I opened it 'cause I felt right off 't was important. I know a little 'Frog', so I managed to wade through some of it.

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It's from yer uncle . . . the priest. He says your ol' man an' the others run away on that lousy, ol' win'jammer to the Grand Banks, an' ain't been heard of since. They're prob'ly lost."

"You mean . . . *mon père* . . . he didn't go home? He didn't go back to the lake?"

"You read it. It was all I could do to spell out part of the lingo."

Jean snatched the closely written sheets and skipped through the first sentences. "That Archie keeps a saloon at Tadousac an' the Spaniard works for him send 'em off on the ol' schooner, Uncle Joseph say. Me . . . I go back an' bust up their place! I show 'em!"

"Oh, so it was them? Well, I don't reckon ye can do much to hurt them rascals," Andrew disagreed. "Ye gotta go back an' help yer Ma. That's what ye better do, but fight shy o' that joint!"

"Sure, I go back to the lake, but first I smash up their business an' throw 'em out of the window!"

"Keep yer head now! Stay away from the murd'ers, if ye know what's good fer ye. Say, what d'ye think they care about killin' one more feller? Ye ain't got a chancet! What else does it say . . . the letter?"

"Yes . . . here . . . what ye think? They say I kill a man . . . *me!* . . . a sailor was dead drunk there . . .!"

"Killed a man? Why, ye was with me all the time till the ship sailed. The black-hearted, lyin' wretches!"

"Sure . . . now I kill 'em!"

"Ye won't do anythin' o' the kind! Ye stay away from 'em, I tell ye! Let 'em be! If they killed ye, yer poor Ma'd be worse off 'n what she is!"

"They know I didn't do it! My uncle say Louis . . . the bar-keep . . . he dies an' before he dies he tells the truth. I didn't do it! Me . . . kill a man with a gun, when I got two fists? Bah!"

"Well, ye let 'em be. Let nature take its course. I figger sometime they'll both get what they deserve . . . mebbe when they get enough of each other, they'll fly at each other's throats."

"I break their necks!" snarled Jean, the blood rushing to his face and the arteries throbbing in his throat. He flexed and un-flexed his huge fists. "God . . . to say that! To send Emile an' the others to their death! I get 'em sure!"

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"They're striped pole-cats, that's what!"

"But to let Émile sail north in that ol' tub! She's not seaworthy."

"Sure . . . they knew it. They threatened to squeal . . . that's what! Flyin' in the face of death . . . on that rotten ol' schooner, with the curse of a changed name upon 'er! Sailin' north into foul weather . . . trapped by her filthy luck. They didn't have a chance. . . ."

"*Mon père* . . . gone . . . *Maman* alone. . . ."

"All of 'em. . . ."

"Émile an' Pat an' Little Bill." Jean crumpled the sheets in his fist and let them drop to the floor, whence Andrew retrieved them and smoothed out the wrinkles. "Ye gotta keep this, kid. . . ."

"I seen enough . . ." muttered Jean.

"I'll put it in my wallet, in case ye want it later. Now we gotta think about yer gettin' started. Got any cash?"

"Sure . . . plenty . . . all I earn," and Jean pulled the bills from his pockets.

"What're carryin' all that around with ye for? It ain't safe!"

"Nobody touch me!"

"There ye go, boastin' again! Yer smartness didn't get ye out o' this here fix, I notice . . . nor them others, I notice! Poor things!"

"They tell that lie because I have gone. They don't dare, if I was there!"

"Did ye bring all yer things?"

"No. . . ."

"We can pick 'em up on the way to the train to-morrer. I been figgerin' ye can ride as fur as Montreal, then ye'll have to get a boat o' some kind."

"Ice in the Saguenay."

"It'll be breakin' up by the time ye get there."

"I can get a sled."

"Sure, that's it! But don't ye get caught in the rotten ice!"

"Me . . . I go up the river with the salmon . . . back to the lake . . . always back to the ol' place! Can't get away from it . . . like the ouananiche."

"Yer Ma needs ye for a while, but ye'll be comin' back, Johnny."

"Sure . . . I take care o' her," and Jean strolled over to the window and gazed out on the bleak landscape. As far as he could

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see were squat bodies of barges, with black smoke curling downward from their chimney-pipes, all snuggled lazily against each other in the mud. Beyond, lay an oily expanse of dark water. A few people moved about . . . two men smearing a muddy tug with wine-red . . . another painting his cabin door bright green . . . and Casey and Shaemus swabbing a duller green on the hull of the Emerald Isle. Wearily Jean let the curtain fall and shuffled up the steps, hands in pockets, whistling under his breath.

"Don't ye go fur away. We gotta be thinkin' about yer leavin'," admonished Andrew.

"No," answered Jean vaguely. Lost . . . all of them! Where? he wondered. Somewhere under this very same sky. Maybe caught in the fog and ramming a reef; or caught in the icy wastes Emile used to tell about, and freezing in . . . or the old lugger with the water pouring into a ragged hole in her side and the men sinking with her to dizzy depths. Jean shuddered. No, she was probably frozen in, he decided, and when the spring came up north, and the ice melted, the old hulk would wake from her winter's sleep, like a canal-boat, and crowd her ancient, creaking body through the ice-floes, back to life again. God wouldn't let them all drown! They'd come back . . . sure. . . .

But now he'd have to go to his mother in the lake country and comfort her. He'd do the ploughing, just as he had last spring, behind the oxen or the old white mare, hitched with the stallion. He'd go hunting for the calf the brindle cow had dropped in the patch of snow, which still lingered in the shadow of the leaning-rock. That brindle was ever a fool! He'd fatten the hogs . . . just as if there were no rivers or seas to navigate! He'd sow and reap and slaughter, and try to barter his harvest for gain. He'd gaze down on the lake from the mountainside, and he'd fish in the River of Deep Waters. His mother needed him! He wondered vaguely what she had done all winter, how she had fared; but, then, she had help . . . two grown girls and Joseph and Henri. He would be glad to see them all again. He must buy some trinket for Lucie, and a bangle-bracelet for that 'tite Marie . . . or maybe a ring with a red stone in it . . . a stone to match the cherry of her lips. Yes!

He laughed suddenly. Ah, that gay, 'tite Marie, singing her everlasting song and dancing in time to the clink-clanking of the wind-mill, as she tripped down the hill from the oven. He remembered her as she was that last day, standing on the bank and

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waving. A ring for Marie and ear-bobs for Lucie . . . little balls of gold like those the snake-charmer wore, when she was dressed up . . . and a breast-pin for *Maman*. And something to leave with his little Jessie, while he was gone.

It would be grand seeing the grass grow green once more in the meadows, and the violets grow blue in the crevices between the rocks and the close-cropped thicket, and lilacs spreading their fragrance around the door.

The door of the Nellie Z slammed shut and presently Jean heard foot-steps come running. "Oh, Jean . . . ! Why, Jean, you were goin' right by without stoppin' ! When did ye get here ? Why didn't ye come right straight to see me ? I think ye're horrid . . . no, I don't !" Jessie attached herself to him with both arms.

"Hello . . . Jessie."

"Why, what's the matter ? Whatever's the matter with ye ? Ye don't love me ! I know ye don't !"

"Ear-bobs for Lucie and a ring for little Marie . . . and a breast-pin for *Maman* . . . an' I was thinkin' *what* for my Jessie," he laughed as he looked down into her eyes and saw that she was weeping. "Don't cry . . . don't," he said tenderly. "Ye see . . . I gotta go back up there now . . . to the lake. *Mon père*, he went off on the ol' win'jammer with Emile, an' they never come back . . . lost in the ice. I go back to *Maman* now and the farm . . . to take care of them. . . ."

"Oh, is that all ?" she asked, wiping her eyes. "Why, it's grand ! I'm glad ! We'll go together !" she cried eagerly.

"You ? But, no, you cannot !"

"An' why not, I'd like to know ? You don't love me ! I knew it !"

"We can't get married now . . . not yet. Later, when I come back."

"Mebbe you'll never come back. Mebbe they'll keep ye there . . . far away from me. Oh, Jean, I can't bear it . . . you'll be so far away ! I'll die here without ye !"

"You are too little . . . too young, Tim say," he argued.

"I am not ! You'll see . . . how I can work ! I am strong."

"But I do not want you there . . . on a farm. I want us on the water . . . all our lives . . . on a boat somewheres . . . a boat of our own, not up there in the cold. When we make gold . . . we buy us a boat. . . ."

"But when will that be ? It takes years and years to buy a boat

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even like the ol' lemon-squeezer! I know how Uncle saved an' saved, an' Auntie wouldn't even let us have cake an' tea. It'll take forever, an' we'll be old!"

"We gotta wait."

"No, it will never be!" she sobbed disconsolately. "This is the first joy I ever had . . . to turn out like this! I might a' known!" She let go of his arm and dropped down dejectedly on an old keg, half-submerged in the mud.

"No, you must not!" Jean cried. "Can't ye see? You gotta see! I love ye! I come back! Yes . . . I come back!" he told her fiercely, lifting her up till her face was on a level with his own. "Listen, you little bird, you little fool girl, I come back! See?" he whispered huskily. "You think I like to go without ye? No! You are all the worl' to me! I come back, I say. You believe me!"

Jessie collapsed weakly against him, hugging his head to her breast.

"You wait . . . see?" he repeated. "I come back as soon as I can . . . mebbe next summer . . . mebbe winter. I do' know, but I come!"

"You promise?"

"Sure . . . you know! Tell me you know!"

"All right. I'll wait, but remember this, I will not live if you do not come back!" and her eyes glittered coldly.

"I say I come back!" he assured her. "I love you ever since I see you in that green water . . . mebbe before . . . that night I fight, an' you wash my hands . . . the night Ruhama die," and gently he led her back to the barge. "My Papa has sail away on the ol' boat an' my *Maman* is alone, so I have to go back up there, but I'll come again . . . soon," Jean told Tim and Brigid. "You tell Jessie. . . . Make her understand. . . ."

And in spite of Andrew's impatience the next day, Jean must stop to buy gold ear-bobs . . . not for Lucie, nor 'tite Marie, but for his love-lorn, bereft Jessie. Little gold doves, they were, dangling from the ends of small chains and bearing tiny gems, red as ripe cherries, in their golden beaks. "Ye give 'em to Jessie, an' tell her I be back."

"Wastin' yer money," grumbled Andrew.

"Ye tell her I come back?" insisted Jean.

"Sure I'll tell her, an' be sure ye do! She's a good, little kid. Ye might do a lot worse," admitted Andrew, as Jean swung excitedly aboard the moving train.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN the lake country dreary days were dragging to their close. Weeks had passed since that apathetic, pitifully small cavalcade had straggled over the snow to the cedar-framed grave, Marie-Blanche and Lucie swathed in their awkwardly improvised black, and followed by the boys and the labor-bent figures of the country folk. Their large, white handkerchiefs limned twisted patterns against the sombre background.

Eyes . . . eyes all about her! Marie would see them to the end of her days. The sad-eyed priest intoning; shifting, self-conscious eyes of neighbors and woodsmen, uneasy in the presence of death; accusing eyes of her children . . . strangers all of them, save 'tit François. There he stood apart, an incongruous spot of scarlet against the drabness . . . and over against a bank of snow, he had left his green and yellow sled. Why? This spot of red was like her passion, that one night blazing its fiery trail into her gray existence. It had instantly set its mark upon her, bringing death as its reward.

"Like a stone she stands there," whispered one woman to her husband. "See! She stands there and weeps not. Women go mad, they say, who cannot weep over their dead . . . and with her man gone, too, God knows where!"

"Humph!" snorted the husband enigmatically. The tales he could tell, if he would! Tales the cripple Barnabé had told at the tavern.

"Tears bring comfort . . . even tears, they say," droned the woman. "Now, but look you, see that Lucie weeping, and to-morrow she will forget all about it . . . but the mother . . . never. A mother. . . ."

"Listen!" ordered the husband testily. Had not this same Marie forgotten her duty to husband and children, in the arms of the brute, Samson? Press him too far, and he'd tell his woman a thing or two! Mother, indeed!

Yet how could he know that Marie-Blanche was in the very act of renouncing Samson forever. She hated herself for her mis-

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deed, and she would lead a chaste life henceforth. The good Father had experienced little difficulty in convincing her of the error of her ways. What if Jean should return, he asked her . . . or Pierre? But Pierre was dead, she had assured him defiantly. How did she know? How indeed? Why, her heart told her . . . a woman's heart! What a crazy fool Pierre had been to go off like that in a rotten, old boat! Ice, fog, bad waters! Everybody knew that! Marie shrugged her shoulders. Of course, he was dead! But she would be loyal, if only to the memory of the sacrificed lamb, 'tite Marie. So she had promised the Father willingly enough.

Back home once more, she continued her quotidian round of duties, from dawn till dark . . . cooking, cleaning and caring for the beasts, in spite of the grim protests of Joseph. But there were gloomy days, no matter how busy she kept herself. Would spring never come? Moodily it gave way to the blustering rigors of winter. The ice was still thick and firm on lake and river, and the sun filtered fearfully through the glowering, heavy clouds, bringing no warmth to the cold earth, which slept as soundly as 'tite Marie. Marie-Blanche faced another responsibility. . . . Samson's child within her. Instead of facing the future with misgiving, it brought her joy. It was as if she were giving a rebirth to the little, sleeping one, and this child would be more hers than all the others, who had belonged to Pierre, too! Each night she thanked Mother Marie, for having answered her prayers and for saving 'tite Marie. She commenced to call the child, "Marie" . . . to talk to it, as if it were alive and warm beside her . . . not the Marie buried in the cold earth.

Facing this new manifestation of their mother's madness, Joseph and Lucie gazed mutely into each other's eyes. Of course, there were places where such as she could be sent . . . maybe Father Joseph would know of one, but families kept such craziness hidden within their hearts and brooded over their cross in solitude. Marie saw them, with their heads always together, and she kept to herself, save when a contrary mood struck her, then let them watch out. Lucie got her ears tweaked for heedlessness, and Pierre must dodge her threatening arm . . . he was so like his father . . . and little François would run from her scowl and cling to Henri's leg.

"Go on . . . get you gone . . . all of you! I have a child of mine own," Marie mumbled to herself. "My 'tite Marie. Dead, you say? Oh, no, living within me! The Virgin gave her back

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to me," but she was careful, all the same, not to say it out loud.

Then one day came the unmistakable smell of spring, and the sun smiled broadly over forest and lake. From the hillock where the oven stood, Marie watched a red sleigh start to cross the lake, ahead of the cracks. She failed to recognize it. An outsider perhaps? Well, what was he doing hereabouts this time of year? And within her generous breast, her heart missed a beat, then throbbed the faster. Whose sled was it, and did it bear a message from the outside world, coming too late? Nonsense! Why did she make herself miserable with such thoughts? Had she not waited faithfully . . . all these last weeks . . . and in vain, gazing off toward the Décharges? Only a mirage! She pressed her cold fingers to her burning eyes, erasing the vision, but, no, there it was still . . . that speck of red so far away, crawling like vermin toward the widening fissures. She could see, as it could not, the swirling, black water ahead. "Don't! Don't go on!" she gasped. "Don't . . . death ahead . . .! Go back! Go back!"

Suddenly, as if in response to her warning, the sleigh faltered, veered, turned sharply and retraced its tracks, back to the world whence it had come. Only a false alarm, and with a sigh of relief, Marie returned to her labors.

All night long the breaking ice groaned in the lake . . . a terrific dynamism rumbling beneath the surface. Boom! Alarum! And the insane waters, heaping up jagged cakes, angles against the gray horizon. Then came the avalanche, turbulently hurling the ice toward the Décharges, always seeking an outlet.

Marie's thoughts turned toward the salmon. The ice would go out: the salmon would come up: the willows would yellow in the hollow by the brook. Hibernating beasts would rouse themselves to activity. He-bears would fill their lank sides with deer-meat and fish, and, marauding once in a while, with a succulent, young pig or calf, which had strayed foolishly, seeking adventure. She-bears would lumber down to the backwaters, ruffled by the unleashed madness of the river, and there they would teach their young to spear the struggling, silver bodies.

Bears? *Ciel!* Bear-meat and Samson! How she hated him! He had cost her dear! But immediately she loved him for giving her this new child, who would be Marie, born again. Samson up there in his stuffy cabin, smelling eternally of bagosse and stale smoke, even with the clean, cold air, leaking in through the cracks. Oh, she was through with him! But, where then, was she to seek

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life, with the coming of spring, which began to make her restless again? Was it to be denied her? François was afraid . . . only last night he whimpered and drew away from her, and ran in to sleep with Henri. When she protested, as was only natural, considering she was his mother, Joseph had stared her down rudely. What right had her children to judge her? Brats, to whom she had given the breath of life! It was as if they blamed her for Marie's death, and here she was giving new life to Marie. They did not know, as she knew, that it was only Marie's shell which lay out there in the bleak grave. Why, the real Marie was alive and well, protected beneath her mother's heart! Who could be closer to her than this little one?

No, they continued to stare at her as if she were a wicked woman, a common bawd. They refused to believe in the holiness of her child, but she'd show them! And it was they who had forced her to seek sympathy and life away from home. So, willingly and unwillingly, she trudged through the bars once more, past the old, white mare, with her glazing, timeless eyes; through the copse, through thicket and forest to Samson. There he was in the door-way, looking at her and laughing.

She watched his red face crinkle into a grin, and his small eyes bury themselves in the folds of his purple flesh. He threw back his head and roared. "You?" The word cascaded with the laughter from his powerful throat. "Ah, I knew you would come, if only I gave you time." Still he stood there, blocking her ingress, and keeping her waiting there for all the world to see, if by chance he went by with his wife. She was forced to face him, baffled, humbled, utterly bewildered, wholly his. At length he emptied his pipe, put it in his pocket, and held out his arms, and she stumbled forward and buried her face in his rough, acrid-smelling coat. He held her away from him and looked at her, and she let the tears roll, unheeded, down her cheeks. Marie-Blanche was not lovely now, but primitive, reawakened, past her youth, and Samson saw it all. Love had played a savagely ironical trick upon her. There was in her veins lush Indian summer, instead of the cooler complacency of a decently matured autumn.

No, Samson thought, she was nothing to look at, and he could get others younger, if he but took the trouble. Perhaps he had wasted his time? But, after all, he had boasted he could have her back, if he beckoned, and here she was!

Marie read the sardonic triumph in his eyes and attempted to

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extricate herself from his bear-like embrace, but he held her fast. "I said you would come, my Marie."

There drifted through her tortured mind one idea . . . marriage. In the eyes of the church and the world that, and that only, would make even savage love seem right and normal. Timidly she broached the thought, and found Samson reluctant, not to say surprised. "*Eh, bien,*" he said slowly. "Yes, but not now. In time, maybe . . . when we know that Pierre is really dead. What if he should come back? There's no hurry. . . ."

No hurry?

"Hurry and live to repent," he continued. "We are happy as we are, having each other, *hein?*" He looked away from her and his face grew sober.

So she must be satisfied with his vague promise.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MARIE-BLANCHE awoke in the early morning and heard it raining . . . a heavy, unrelenting downpour. The roof leaked and water dripped dismally in an ever-widening puddle by the stove. In the cold, gray light, her surroundings appeared stale and dreary. She shivered and huddled close to Samson beneath the bear-skins, thinking casually of the coming day and its labors. She must get up soon, for somebody was sure to come by on his way to work, some chopper or sawyer or mill-hand, asking for coffee or a swig of bagosse. Perhaps Coli, humming his insinuating songs; or big Thomas gazing at her with vapid eyes; or Christophe, the raftsmen . . . perhaps Barnabé with his crooked back. Ah, she feared Barnabé!

She arose with alacrity and without stopping to smooth her hair, drew on her cloak and stepped out into the dank air. Almost at once the rain soaked her bare head and beat relentlessly upon her face, pouring over its rugged planes, like the swollen torrent rushing down the mountainside. As she faced the rain, she was very like the enduring mountain in the tempest, battling with her robust strength and, in the end, conquering through her very submission. Now and again she shook her bedraggled mane and sprayed a shower of water about her as she stumbled ahead through the dim light.

At last she reached the rise above her house and saw lights in the windows. What now? Another ill? Dead? But, no, the red sleigh told her . . . that same, red sleigh which yesterday had turned about in its tracks and headed back toward civilization. Of evil portent, she had known!

Again she met the gloomy eyes of the old mare, staring out of the barn-door. Careless ones! They had neglected to fasten the latch. But perhaps . . . Pierre? Jean? No! They were gone forever, and she had chosen a new life for herself. She hurried into the house and found them astir. Perhaps they had not gone to bed at all?

"*Maman*," called François excitedly. "But . . . see . . . Jean . . . our great Jean is back!"

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"He would have come earlier, but the ice cracked up and he had to come around the long way," Lucie explained, flushing self-consciously as she faced her mother.

Marie returned her gaze, but inwardly shivered. How well, she had imagined so many times, their positions might have been reversed. . . . Lucie ruined, and Marie, her mother comforting her. Ah, how she'd protect her! Half-consciously she held out her arms, but dropped them instantly to her sides . . . stupid thought! And she turned toward Jean. What a strange, young fellow! Who was this giant who stared down at her? Her Jean? "My son!" she cried hysterically. "My Jean . . . my own baby . . .!"

"Hello, *Maman*," he said evenly.

He knows, she thought. They've told him! And sensing his glance at her dishevelled hair, her hands flew up to make repairs. "It's wet . . . it's raining, you see," she tried to say.

"Sure," he said nonchalantly.

Another enemy! She would never forgive them for telling! Why, she and Jean had known each other long before these others had seen the light of day! Here was this great prodigal son come back to her, and she'd tell him a thing or two about leaving his poor mother alone to take care of the children, the harvesting and the animals . . . not to mention the woodsmen! She'd box his ears, that she would . . . if only he were less the man and stranger. Ah, no, she was the prodigal one, and her eyes fell before his scrutiny, even, appraising, cool, uncomprising. Her boy had grown up! He knew things about women he had not known before. He had lived . . . away from her.

She looked at him searchingly, then tried to tear her glance away, but something fascinated her . . . the cool regard, or the perfect equanimity with which he lighted his pipe . . . or the flare from the taper, which lit up his strong features and formed fantastic patterns of chiaroscuro. Was he serious or was he grimacing? Insolent one!

And, without pity, Jean watched his mother, striving to smoothen the heavy, wet hair . . . striving to efface her degradation. All woman, she was trying to beautify herself in his eyes. Ah, *Maman*! He saw her soul laid bare, tortured upon the rack of despair and shame. He recognized the baffled pain in her eyes; he saw her beseeching; the begging of her pride, and still he continued to stare cruelly and without comment, for he was very young.

It was Lucie who bade her sit down, and brought a towel to

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wipe the damp tresses. Jean merely puffed impressively on his pipe and shifted his gaze to the fire. "Go to bed," he said finally to the others, for he wanted to bawl, and he wouldn't make a fool of himself before them. "Go on. . . ."

"It's time to think of the beasts and the chores," objected Joseph.

"Look how he tries to run the place since you and your father left," murmured Marie.

"Get to bed, all of you, and get a little rest. Plenty of time to work . . . later," Jean commanded them and they crept away.

Only Marie and Jean, mother and son, were left facing each other in front of the birch wood fire.

"So?" queried the boy at length. "So you couldn't wait?"

"Don't say that! Don't talk like that to me . . . you . . . you! You and he went off and left me here," she sobbed.

"And you a grown woman." Jean watched the tears coursing down her cheeks, making even more ugly her heavy features, grown coarser than he remembered them.

"I . . . oh, Jean, I don't know why," she whimpered miserably. "What'll I ever do now? What can I do?" She allowed her body to slump over her knees, her arms hanging inertly at her sides, and the tears rolling, unchecked, down her face. Jean's soul stirred and ventured forth to meet that other's, naked, shorn of its matriarchal pride, of its greater age, of its vestments of civilization. It begged humbly for understanding and sympathy . . . like a little child. All he had learned these months from the Billings, from Lancy and Adam, from the tragedy of the Towman . . . from the naïve adoration of Jessie, came rushing back to him. Shadowy, pleading arms reached out to him from a tumultuous crowd of phantoms. Sobs rose in his throat.

He jumped up and flung his pipe aside . . . and with it, his accusing airs, and strode over to his mother. "*Maman*," he said tenderly. "*Maman*," and throwing himself on his knees, he buried his face in her lap, and hungrily Marie's arms twined about him. "It'll be all right . . . sure. I take care of you . . . see? I take care of you!"

Like two carven figures, they stayed there in close embrace until both were cramped from cold and fatigue. At length he pushed her arms aside and stood up. "Go . . . change your clothes, *Maman* . . . and rest. *Vite! Vite!*" and he threw back his head and laughed.

Marie smiled ruefully, then rose and passed slowly from the room. Only once she turned, "*Merci* . . . my son . . . *merci*."

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Jean continued to laugh, the sound rumbling in his throat, then rising in full crescendo, gurgling low again and ending in a sob. He sat down on the floor, and whimpering like a hurt dog, buried his face in the chair she had quitted. Thus he remained for some moments, then roused himself and lit his pipe, and as he watched the morning grow great with light, he allowed hate to swell in his heart. Who was this man . . . this Samson Joseph had named, who had seduced his mother? He'd hunt him out like a beast and kill him! He'd break him in his two hands like a dry stick! Thus he'd blot out her shame!

And sitting there beside the dying fire, he laid his plans. He would seek work beside Samson and never leave his side. Presently there would come a day when they'd be working alone on the mountainside, close by the edge of things. They'd be perched like eagles above the yawning chasm, hanging over limitless space, where only a bird is safe. Below them would be the abrupt drop and the ever-descending tops of trees . . . or maybe ragged, sheared stumps, and down there at the bottom, black water, swirling over hidden rocks . . . or still, and so deep there was no fathoming its depth. A drop of several hundred feet to certain death, and foul-mouthed Samson would be boasting, there on the brink of the abyss, that nobody lived who could fell a tree so quick as he.

Oh, Jean intended to give him a fighting chance. He'd let him battle for his life, but Jean was young and strong . . . an easy victor. As he had conquered Bull and the others, as he had moved the old mud-hog of a barge through the ice, he would send Samson hurtling through space to his doom . . . a broken thing! Then he would shout and carry on and the others would come running. He'd even point with simulated horror to the lifeless thing down there . . . or to the broken surface of the water.

And if they questioned him? What if they investigated and found marks on the fellow's throat? Why, he'd say that Samson had suddenly gone raving crazy and had turned on him like a wild beast . . . too much bagosse! . . . ah, yes! . . . had turned on him like a great he-bear, and he, Jean, had been obliged to fight for his life . . . *hélas!* As day brightened through the mist of rain, Jean planned it all carefully. Then he arose, yawned, stretched his cramped legs, and threw himself on the cot to sleep.

With the advent of spring, the Ouananiche had traveled up the River of Deep Waters, back to his natural habitat once more, to the kingdom of Koko.

CHAPTER XXIX

GRADUALLY the ice went out of the lake, and in a dream, Jean could fancy it passing down that other great river, piling up sluggishly in the narrows, floating lazily across the broad bosom of Tappan Sea, and disappearing. The canal-people, that strange race of wanderers, would be taking their first trip north. In man the life-blood was stirring and destroying the stagnation of winter, while in the swamps the sap was bringing a golden blush to osiers.

Salmon leapt up the great rivers of the north, fighting the torrent, breasting barriers, and brown bears caught them in the inlets, as they had done since the beginning of time. In the lake country Indians fished from canoes, gliding like wild geese over the teeming waters, and when they were not watched closely, spearing their catch, which was against the law.

Marie-Blanche and Lucie salted down some of the sweet flesh, as was befitting prudent French women. With anguish in her eyes, never with longing now, Marie set her lips and gazed off over the windswept lake, seeking the distance beyond Kenogami, fearing, now that Jean had come, to see Pierre. What could she tell him? Sometimes she repeated moodily to herself, "And mind you bring him back . . . and bring yourself back, too," just as she had admonished him that summer day. "You! You're just another ouananiche, struggling to get away!" And in her heart she prayed, "Stay away . . . stay away . . .!" Sometimes her ears deceived her and above the whining of the wind and the roaring of the gale, she would hear Pierre calling across the water, "*Holà . . . Holà.*" Then she would rush to the door, anxious to expose her shame and have it over with. Nothing! Nothing, but the wind howling over the troubled waters! "Ah, why do I fuss? He is dead! I know that."

Each morning Jean roused himself before the others and called Lucie, and sat down to eat what she set before him, then stuffing a hunk of bread and a piece of Orleans cheese or some meat into his bundle for his noon-day snack, trudged off to camp. He trod the half-frozen, half-sodden ground like a young Titan, and his

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feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth, save through the morass. A three-mile walk, and into camp before the morning siren blew. "Here I am . . . the giant, Jean Grenon!" he sang, and laughed at the smiling sky.

"Oh, they had hired him readily enough. Who wouldn't? A young colossus, who had travelled some, and who could do the work of three men! Side by side with the best of them, Jean worked and laughed. He told stories of his adventures in the States . . . of the canal, of the great, broad river, flowing silently past haunted hills and valleys to the sea . . . of women and fights, and the greatest city on earth, and he exaggerated a little, as was only fair. He never spoke of Jessie. She belonged to that other world.

At first Samson stared at him sullenly, but within a few days he had accepted him and even grew fond of him, like a son. Why not? The boy seemed to like him, too. Jean was always right beside him, not exactly in the way, but always on hand when there was something hard to be done, and he was a wonder with the axe, no denying! Sometimes Samson chose to show off, this bully who had got into the habit of bossing the others and letting them use their muscles. He started swinging his axe again! He and Jean would strip off their bright jackets and strive with each other like two trained contestants. Once in a while, after a warning cry, Samson's tree would crash first, but most often Jean won the contest easily, and Samson would gaze at him proudly and say, "He's a great lad . . . my boy!" Then they would laugh and wipe off the sweat and, linking arms, would stroll off together to Injun Joe's for a drink of bagosse.

Samson was glad that Jean had accepted him without a word of protest. Perhaps some day, if all went well, he would marry the mother and settle down to let somebody else work for him, and so he started dropping in to call on Marie once more. Jean would greet him with a studied grin and pretend to shoo the resentful children from under foot. Stupid Samson ignored the ill-will of Joseph and the hostile glances of Lucie, and the scared faces of Pierre or François, forever peeking from behind the sheds. How could he know that they reported to Jean later? Generously Jean brought out some potent, old wine, which dulled the doltish senses of Samson. Then the man would show his true self, pawing Grande Marie, who, under the eyes of her son, must flinch and draw away.

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Once, half in play, but to warn her, too, that he was strong and would brook no trifling from his woman, Samson encompassed her throat with his great hands, pressing her wind-pipe ever so slightly. Fool! She gasped, choked and grew purple, and flapped her arms like the wings of a silly hen, flopping away from the chopping-block, blood spurting from its clean-cut neck. Samson stared at her, blear-eyed, and held on a little longer, until he felt Jean's grip upon his wrist, bending it, breaking it. He groaned and came to with a start, laughing nervously as he met the boy's eyes, and swore softly under his breath, as he loosed his hold and grabbed a mug of bagosse, quaffing deeply. So?

God, the lad's eyes had bored holes into his muddy soul! For two or three days after that, he stayed by himself, bossing more, drinking more and showing his authority upon all occasions. Drink soon made him forget his caution, however, and the hatred in the boy's eyes. Why, he had begun to think of Jean as his own son. He had trusted him! Samson felt sorry for himself.

CHAPTER XXX

COLI had started coming to the house again, now that Jean was home. His small, bright eyes twinkled with laughter, and when he laughed, his black brows arched at sharp angles, like a satyr's, paralleling the lines of his delicate, pointed ears. That Coli was smart! He'd gaze at Marie with an air of feigned innocence, then dash into another lilting melody. Marie sat by the fire, before her spinning-wheel. Its endless revolutions gave her an excuse for keeping her eyes down, avoiding Coli's stare. Yet she was quite aware of that burning glance, boring holes in her. Silently he mocked her secret, which was, in truth, nobody's secret.

And one tragic night Barnabé came with Coli. "He's cold and lonesome," explained Coli, shoving his brother ahead of him, into the house. "He has no friends but me, and without me close by his side, he fears the night and the evil things it holds. Let him but sit by your fire and warm himself. He won't so much as open his mouth, I promise you."

"Sure! Bring him in," invited Jean cordially, and Barnabé slouched across the room, with each lurch of his malformed body, describing an arc, as he threw his left leg forward to meet the right.

It was raining and Barnabé paused before the fire to shake his hat and coat. Marie shuddered at the savage sputter the drops made as they fell on the coals. "The wicked devil!" she muttered. "He's the devil himself! Well I know!"

"They say 't is good luck to rub his hump," Pierre whispered hoarsely.

"Hush! He'll hear you and 't will make him angry," Lucie warned the boy.

Marie gazed doggedly at her wheel. She would like to leave, but she dared not show herself as she must, if she rose to walk the distance between her chair and the door of her bedroom. No, far better to sit and spin, come what may.

Barnabé gave her but a passing glance. Ugh! The misshapen wretch! Sad, the mother who bore him! He must not be allowed

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to come here again! She mustn't think about him . . . mustn't look at him! He would mark the child within her! If 'tite Marie, the dancing, singing one, were born with a hump! She shuddered at the idea.

Barnabé watched Jean, showing clearly his passionate admiration for his beautiful body. "Grand, strong body," he murmured. "Why," he boasted, "the lad could squeeze ol' Samson in his two hands . . . squeeze him to death, and throw him down the mountainside. Bang! There he'd go bumping against rocks and stumps until he struck the bottom. Squeeze him like that," and he proceeded to demonstrate with his knotty claws. "Ha, ha, ha—ha!"

"Hush!" shouted Jean, wheeling around. "What do you mean?"

"Hush, Barnabé," said Coli calmly.

"*Rien* . . . nothing . . . ha, ha, ha! I can see him now, lying at the bottom," and laughter bubbled loosely from his lips. "Great, big body tumbling over the rocks. . . ."

"Shut up, I tell you!" commanded Jean. "Shut up or get out! Do you want to feel the strength of my fists? Let Samson alone! He hasn't harmed you . . . sure." What could the idiot mean? "If you wish to stay here and warm yourself by the fire, shut your fool mouth!" Jean towered above the cringing figure.

"But, Jean, he means nothing . . . only what he hears them talk about," Coli tried to pacify the other and started to play again . . . an insinuating melody.

"He . . . he . . . that Samson stole Coli's Marie," whimpered Barnabé.

"I tell you . . . hush!" said Jean, as he grabbed the fellow's arm.

"Ouch," Barnabé begged for mercy. "Lucky Samson not to have felt the strength of you, ere this!"

The violin continued to whine out its thin treble, but for Jean the evening was spoiled and he had no choice but to squat on the settle, brooding. What could the lame fellow have meant? Had he read his thoughts? He must be more careful! Why, only yesterday Jean had been working beside Samson, who, with a powerful shove of his hob-nailed boot, had sent a precariously tilted log hurtling into space, crashing over the precipice, a sheer drop of several hundred feet. He had stood gazing after it for a long time, as if fascinated, before he shouted his orders. Very close to eternity had Samson been at that moment, but just then Jean had spied Barnabé lurking behind a tree. He called to him loudly

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. . . more loudly than was necessary, and Samson had shied away from the edge, through premonition or irritation.

Perhaps the hunchback was gifted with second sight . . . wasn't that what they called it? . . . like the old squaw. Jean would plan more carefully from now on.

Lucie rose to fetch bagosse and biscuits, and Barnabé pushed his stool nearer to the fire. Under cover of this, Marie-Blanche got up and moved stealthily across the room to her chamber-door. She would hide herself from prying eyes, so she opened the door and went in, closing it softly behind her. After the briefest pause, Coli's music resumed its rhythmic monotony, but Jean's alert ears caught another sound . . . the rasping of a hinge . . . the opening and closing of another door. Marie had taken the nails from the door his father had kept boarded up. Ah . . . so? Jean rose and put a fresh log on the fire. The sparks flew out, scorching the hair on his hands, as he poked among the embers. Then he marched straight to the door and let himself out. Let her get a head-start; he could catch up with her without half trying! And he met her by the bars, leading into the upper meadow.

"Where are you bound for on a night like this? And in your condition, too?" he demanded sternly. "Are you crazy? Come back. . . ."

"No . . . I go! I go to him! It is better so . . . I will stay with him. I can bear it no longer, being hounded like a beast! It is Samson's child I carry . . . and I go to him, where I belong!"

"Be still! You are coming home with me now," Jean argued, taking her arm.

"You? What right have you?" she demanded hysterically.

"Come," he insisted.

"No, I go to him."

With that, Jean lifted her from her feet, and holding her stiffly, trudged back with his burden. He carried her around to the side-entrance and set her down in her room once more. "Don't do that again," he warned her. "Now, go to bed. To-morrow I shall have Joseph nail up the door, as Father left it."

"I couldn't bear his great, bulging eyes boring into my body! He is the evil one!"

"He need not come again. I will tell Coli."

"He'll mark the child . . . my little one! He'll set the devil's mark on her . . . birth-marks . . . or worse—his crooked back. . . ."

"He will not come again. I shall see to that . . . sure."

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"He hates Samson, that Barnabé! Years ago when you were small, and Samson was a great strong youth like yourself, and Barnabé was but a growing lad, a puny, sick thing better dead than alive, his own grandmother said, Samson came upon him, one fine day, stealing from his traps and knew it was not the first time. Samson beat him severely and twisted his arm till the bone nigh cracked. Barnabé did not forget . . .," Marie explained.

"The big bully . . . to lick a cripple!"

"But, don't you see . . . he had stolen from Samson's traps . . .?"

"Samson was strong and he was weak. Get to bed now," Jean ordered her, and returned to the others.

The next day and the next, Jean sought work far from Samson. He must keep away from him and think out a better plan, but thinking did little good. His mother stuck sullenly to her spinning and weaving, and never once mentioned the door Joseph had nailed up. With what vigorous resentment he had driven in each spike, and each blow seemed to exact its drop of blood from her heart. Why didn't Samson come to marry her? Better to throw herself in the lake and end it all. But she was afraid of what the Father might say. Drowning herself in the blackness of her sin . . . killing the child within her . . . she'd be damned forever! No, she decided, she couldn't do that.

So Jean remained at a distance from Samson, knowing that he could not keep this up, for Samson would suspect. He was working with Coli in the new clearing away from the others, when it happened. Thomas came stumbling through the brush, shouting to Jean and Coli, "Come . . .! Hey . . . come . . .! *Vite!*" he called. It's Samson and Barnabé. . . ."

"What?"

"They fought on the very edge of the cliff and rolled over . . . down . . . down, we saw them disappear. . . ." Thomas paused for breath.

"God, why didn't you stop them?" yelled Coli, running like a rabbit, but Jean outdistanced him and stood with the others, gazing at the broken bodies far below.

"What happened?"

"Samson was standing right over here smoking, when all of a sudden Barnabé crept up on him. Samson turned and caught him up in his arms, but the hunchback clung like a tiger to his throat, choking him till his face was purple. We dared not try to drag them apart for fear they would fall below . . . then they did . . .

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they fell, tussled where they lay and rolled nearer the brink. Somebody shouted and they seemed to hesitate the briefest instant before they rolled over . . . bumping . . . bumping . . . down to the bottom and there they lie," croaked old man Gregoire, "loose at last."

"I go to get them," offered Jean, his breath coming in sobs through his clenched teeth. Now that the deed was done, he was sorry.

"You can't. You'll fall."

"I know the way. I shall go down by the chute."

"You're crazy! Take the path!"

But, no, Jean rushed past them, and descended, scrambling, slipping, sliding, and somehow down safely, through sheer bravado. Samson, he discovered had been instantly killed, but Barnabé's heart was beating faintly, and he groaned as Jean bent over him and raised him up. Jean supported the crumpled back tenderly against his breast. Strangely enough, the fall had seemed to straighten the deformed body, from which the soul was winging its way to freedom.

"God . . . forgive . . . I killed him. Yes, I . . . the hunchback . . . the weakling, killed Samson . . . Coli . . . pray . . . pray for me . . .!"

Jean gazed about him helplessly. Where was Coli? Where was a priest? Nobody in sight! He was left alone with the dying. . . . He must pray for the soul of Barnabé! Painfully his lips formed the words . . . "Mother Mary . . . Mother mild . . . Jésus, be good to him . . . to Barnabé! Pain is all he has ever known . . . pain and torture from his maimed body. Be kind to him and straighten out his soul!"

"Coli . . . Coli."

"Here, brother," whispered Jean, wiping the moisture from Barnabé's brow. Why did they not come? Way above him he could hear them crashing through the brush, like hounds who have lost the trail. "Lie back and rest, Barnabé."

"I . . . killed . . . him . . . even I . . . and now she is yours," he whispered, his eyes clouded by approaching death.

So Coli was jealous? "Sure," mumbled Jean. All of them after his mother, so that was it? "Sure," he reiterated gently through trembling lips.

"Hold . . . me . . . tight . . . Coli! It grows cold . . . and dark. . . ."

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Jean drew the limp body closer. Poor Barnabé! Jean could see him, huddled over the fire, like a gnome . . . and nearby his mother crouched beside her revolving wheel. All spite had gone from his heart . . . only infinite pity remained. Barnabé's breathing was scarcely perceptible, and now he sighed ever so softly. "Does it hurt . . . much?" asked Jean, but Barnabé slept sweetly, and after a moment Jean eased him tenderly to the ground, just as the others came in sight, Coli in the lead. "He . . . he's gone, Coli, but all the time he thought I was you, and I pretended," Jean explained. "So it's all right. He thought a lot of you, Coli . . . enough to die for you."

Coli nodded and stood there with tears running down his cheeks. "I understood him and loved him," he whispered huskily, "and he loved me. . . ."

CHAPTER XXXI

So Jean came tramping home, later than usual . . . sad and yet jubilant, too. Samson was dead! Dead! Punished at last, and Jean's hands were still innocent of his blood. Murder had been in his heart, he knew, but something had prevented his taking part in the actual performance of the deed. As the eldest son and head of the house of Grenon, he had to look to its honor . . . he! But Barnabé had killed Samson, poor broken Barnabé, and now Jean must tell them here at home. He shrank from it, for he knew it would be hard.

He grew suddenly tired and his feet lagged, so he sat down on the stone-wall and ruminated. To be sure Samson's demise helped some, but there were still other duties exacted of him, before he could leave the lake and return to Jessie. Why, he was almost forgetting how she looked! Even nights, when his thoughts winged back to her, he must force her image to appear . . . bit by bit . . . the graceful slenderness of her body, the delicate darkness of her beauty . . . and finally the ardent warmth of her gray eyes, which had burned scars into his heart that last day, when he had torn himself away from her.

Now Joseph hailed him from the cow-shed. "You're late! Why do you sit there? I'm late, too, but yes! The brindle dropped her calf, and I hunted all day. Where do you think I found her? In the mire by the spring in Neighbor Gregoire's pasture . . . the fool."

"Yes, the brindle was ever a fool." Jean nodded. "Where's *Maman*?"

"In the house likely . . . sitting by the window, where she was when I left . . . sitting there and looking off toward the lake. She does not spin, but sits idly and looks out of the window."

"*Eh bien*, Samson is dead . . . and Barnabé, too," said Jean bluntly.

"*Dieu!* Dead?"

"Yes, they fought till they dragged each other over the edge. Samson died as he struck, but Barnabé lived a little moment. . . . He died in my arms."

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"*Ciel!* Dead! Praise be! Justice at last and punishment for the wicked one! Peace for *Maman*," Joseph crossed himself.

"I don't know about that," said Jean slowly. "But the soul of poor Barnabé is at rest, I am sure of that. Oh, I know they will say he died in violence, but somehow I know everything was straightened out for him . . . at last. He saw clean and straight. See?"

"*Hein?* But, no, he died with murder in his heart!" argued Joseph.

"Murder in his heart? I wonder?"

"Of course, somebody had to kill him . . . the beast!"

"I don't think it matters about Barnabé. He died for Coli."

"Coli? *Hein?* What has Coli got to do with it?"

"No matter," said Jean, turning toward the house.

"But, see here, how are you going to tell *her*?"

"Leave it to me. Perhaps when she sees that he comes no more, she may think he has gone away."

"She will find out."

"It is bad, they say, to tell a woman suddenly. . . ."

"It is well for her that he is dead!" vowed Joseph darkly.

"That's what I think! No, Barnabé was not to blame. 'T was the good Lord felled Samson like an ox."

"Let's not say anything to her about it . . . not yet."

"As you will." Joseph was glad to shift the responsibility.

In spite of the warmth of the late spring, Marie-Blanche was cold to-day. It was as if snow were still on the mountains, and a raw wind blew in from the lake. She shivered before the fire, and drew her shawl closer; and thought of small Marie suffering the chill of death. Vague draughts molested her ankles, and she held her purple fingers toward the blaze to warm them. Dully she watched Lucie, coming and going, hurrying about her household tasks. Pierre ran to help her take the loaves from the oven, before he and 'tit François scampered off to the woods, squirrel-hunting.

"The sun is so warm to-day. Why don't you come and sit by the mound in the sunshine?" Lucie begged her.

"I will stay here," said Marie, and thus she had waited throughout the long day.

"Hello, *Maman*," Jean called to her now, as he was washing up.

"Is there any news?" she questioned, almost fearfully.

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"We worked, Coli and I, in the clearing. . . ."

She nodded, easily satisfied.

Henri came in and Joseph, then the two younger boys, running down the hillside and dashing into the house, panting and out of breath.

"Where are your squirrels, hunters?" asked Jean with forced gaiety.

They ignored his question and stood staring at him. Then François piped up, "Where you been all this time? Don't ye know Samson is dead? And poor Barnabé, too. Haven't ye heard?"

"Rolled over a cliff, they did . . . fighting like the devil!" Pierre continued.

"Well . . . and what of it? Woodsmen often get hurt," said Jean evenly.

His mother rose . . . to her terrifying height, and seemed to keep on rising like a column of smoke. "So?" she screamed. "Killed, you say? Samson . . . dead? Pity you wouldn't tell me! And that ugly, little wretch with him? Small glory in that death!"

"Stop!" Jean thundered. "You musn't say that!" Then more quietly, "Please, Maman, let the dead rest in peace! Barnabé was not ugly when he died. His face . . . his body . . . I shall never forget . . . straightened out, they were, as if some miracle had happened . . . as if some hand had reached down from heaven to smooth out his poor body . . . He. . . ."

"You were scared before death! His crooked soul was still there, never fear!" She scorned him.

"You are wrong, Maman. No, he loved Coli . . . as much as a mother loves her child. That will save him, I think."

"As a mother loves her child? Are you mad? What do you know of a mother's love? How great . . .!"

"Hush, *Maman*, do not get excited," urged Lucie.

"Barnabé was a devil, I tell you. May he burn in hell!"

Jean turned toward her angrily, his fists clenched.

"And Samson, too!" shouted Joseph.

"Stop!" commanded Jean. "May their souls rest in peace," he amended reverently, tiredly. "Let us eat."

"Yes, he's better off, poor, dead thing . . . and black Samson, too," remarked Joseph.

"How you all must hate me!" sobbed Marie wildly. "He's dead! Now, what shall I do?" and she beat her breast.

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"Calm yourself, *Maman* . . . please."

"You tell me not to get excited . . . *you* . . . not to care, I suppose! What do you young things know about love? What is left in life for me?"

"Why . . . we . . . we are here . . . all of us, aren't we?" asked Lucie naïvely.

"Yes . . . we," chorused Pierre and François.

"No . . . only my little Marie! She is my own. I have her still and she is all mine now . . . neither the runt, Pierre's, nor Samson's . . . mine!"

"You'd better get her to bed," Jean directed Lucie.

"I will stay here!" insisted his mother.

"Well, I have worked. I am hungry. Let us eat," said Joseph sourly.

Silently they seated themselves and ate. Finally, tortured by her thoughts, Marie burst out, "Well, what happened? Can't you tell me? I am waiting to hear! They were all set against him, for he was strong, my Samson! They hated him because they feared him! I suppose Barnabé sneaked upon him. . . ."

"They fought. That is all I know."

"Barnabé fought Samson?" Marie threw her head back and shrieked with mad laughter. "Fought Samson! To think he would dare!"

"Samson had injured him, he thought. He held a grudge," said Jean quietly.

"I know many folks held a grudge against Samson. There's the foolish girl down in the Hollow . . . and the widow-woman in Robervál . . .," offered Henri sullenly. "I expect it was coming to him."

Marie burst into violent weeping and left the table. She resumed her seat by the fire and gradually the sobs which racked her great body, subsided into faint hiccoughs. She brooded there like a melancholy sibyl.

"Give her warm water," Jean advised Lucie. "I remember Ma Billings said that once."

"I am glad he is dead, that Samson! See the state she is in," whispered Lucie.

Marie looked at her sharply, as if she had heard, then she got to her feet and went into her room and closed the door, and they heard her say, "My children . . . they want me to die . . . me . . . their mother! But, no, I shall live for her. . . ."

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"I, too, am glad he is dead. I wanted to kill him myself, only I . . . I dared not," Joseph spoke without boasting.

"I had planned to kill him when the time came," said Jean soberly, and so quietly, that it sounded not like Joseph's hesitant confession, but fell in their midst like a thunder bolt . . . the death knell. "I think Barnabé knew."

They opened their mouths and stared at him. "You? You? But, of course!"

"Sure."

"I am glad he is dead," whispered Lucie, glancing toward her mother's door. "And I wish the child were dead, too, but they say a child gotten in sin seldom dies. To-morrow will I make a wreath for Barnabé. How he laughed last Christmas when I gave him the ginger-cake! . . . then he cried a little."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE first day of June dawned brightly upon lake and mountains. Lilacs bloomed beside the door. The black crown of the forest crept down to the shimmering waters, and eagles soared from crag to crag through the warm, blue sky. Back through ageless nature came little Pierre, trudging up the path from the town. Sweat poured from his brow. He carried his faded coat tightly rolled beneath the pit of his right arm, and a slim bundle was slung over his left shoulder.

He paused before the lilacs and shouted "*Holà . . . Holà*," to the empty house.

The old, white mare sidled closer to the bars, thrust her hammer-head across the top rail and stared at him with solemn eyes. After a moment, he broke the silence again, "*Holà . . . Holà!*", and his hounds came bounding out from behind the cow-shed, bay-ing to high heaven. An instant they stood, trembling, gaping, their hair bristling, before they wriggled toward him, whimpering. Pierre stroked their heads and jowls absently and whacked their lean rumps. "Ah, my little ones," he whispered to them. "You have not forgotten me." He let his bundle drop and taking off his cap, sniffed the lilac-laden air hungrily. It was good . . . good to smell nature again and not the salt sea. Again he called, "*Holà*. Are you there?"

Just then Lucie appeared from the wood, tripping delicately down the hill-side, swinging a basket of eggs. She stopped short when she saw her father. "Ah . . . you . . . what do you want? Oh, papa, it is you . . . you . . .!" and she rushed toward him.

"Lucienne!" He kissed her red lips and fondled her bright hair. "Where's your mother?" he asked.

Lucie's eyes filled with dread. "Why . . . she must be within . . . sure."

"*Holà*, Marie, come out here! Where are you, Marie?"

"Never mind," said Lucie. "Let us go to meet Jean . . .," she begged him. "I'll set my eggs inside. The speckled hen hid her nest in the woods, but I found it. We'll go to meet Jean and

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surprise him." Lucie knew her mother was hiding and felt that she must keep them apart somehow. She dreaded their meeting. Perhaps it might have been better if he . . . Pierre . . . had never returned, but, no, how many times they had wished him back!

"So Jean is back? That bad fellow has returned, eh? But, no, I cannot go further to-day. I am weary after a year's wandering . . . weary," and he sank down on the bench.

"Yes . . . of course . . . I know. Almost a year and so much can happen! We thought you were lost, all of you. We heard that the ship had gone down . . . with all hands. They even told tales of a ghost ship that was very like Emile's old boat. . . ."

"She went down, yes, and the others went down with her, but somehow I escaped. I was saved for other hardships, but they have ended now," he sighed. "The good people in the north cared for me, and I stayed and worked with them until spring came, and the ice broke up in the sea and ships came once more. I earned my passage back and here I am. So Jean, that other wanderer, has returned? Joseph said he sent him on his way up the river, but so many things have happened, so many hopes have died, how could I know that he had come back? But where are the others? Are they well?"

"Wait here and rest. They will come. Jean will be here soon . . . and Joseph."

"Where is the little one . . . and Pierre?"

"Out in the woods somewhere. They have grown so, you will scarcely know them . . . such great fellows!" she chattered, "and Henri is as big as Jean. Joseph, he is a sober fellow. He cared for us like a father until Jean returned."

"And Jean. . . ."

"A giant, our Jean! What he knows! Everything! And he is kind to us, this Jean."

"T is well he is! Running away and frightening Emile and me like he did! Scaring us into that reckless trip north!"

"But he never knew what they had accused him of . . . never knew till Uncle Joseph's letter reached him."

"I stopped off to visit Joseph and he told me that Jean's name had been cleared. Those murderous thieves! I shunned the place. Never fear! But Joseph and I met Archambaud on the road, and he turned pale when he saw me, as if he had seen a dead man. Archambaud stared at me, then he fled. The Spaniard, they say, is dead. A lumber-jack knifed him!"

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"Will you eat?"

"A bit of bread and cheese, perhaps, and a sip of wine. But where is your mother?"

"She must have gone out . . . into the fields, perhaps."

"And where is that gay 'tite Marie . . . the pretty one?"

"Ah . . . Marie . . ." Lucie looked sad and tears filled her eyes.

"Tell me. Where is she? Has anyone harmed her?"

"She lies over there by the chapel. It was lung-fever. . . ."

"My laughing, singing, little one! I used to chide her for her joyous laughter. Alas!" Tears rolled, unheeded, down his cheeks.

"To-morrow I shall make a wreath for you to lay on her grave. Now you must sit here and rest while I get your food. It is so hot within . . . better to sit in the shade. Jean will be coming soon, for the shadows are already creeping up the mountains. Sit here by the lilacs. How sweet they are! The sky hovers over the lake to-day as if it were trying to see its own fair face in the reflection."

"Foolish talk! I hate it! I hate the everlasting water! I am going away from it forever, back into the hills! Bring me some bagosse. I am not hungry now . . . only bring me the drink. I will wait and eat with the others."

"There's new bread I'll bring you to eat with the bagosse."

While Lucie busied herself frying pork and potatoes, and preparing the cress salad, Pierre sat silently gazing at the forest and lake. He noticed that they had destroyed the grove of cedars just beyond his line. Man and axe and machine coming to his very door-step, working havoc and destruction! "Ruined," he grumbled, and Lucie, thinking of her mother, repeated, "Ruined."

The boys came straggling in, François and 'tit Pierre first. They threw themselves noisily into their father's arms and kept up a ceaseless volley of questions, allowing Pierre's thoughts no opportunity to turn to Marie, for which Lucie was thankful. Joseph and Henri strolled down from the field where they had been cultivating. Henri talked gaily, but Joseph was strangely ill-at-ease and silent before his father. Finally just as they were sitting down to supper, Jean came bounding down the path and burst through the open door with a loud "*Holà*." He stared about him, blinking, trying to accustom himself to the darker interior, for dusk fell early under the mountain. At last he saw. . . . "Ah, *mon père*! Ah . . . you, at last!" and he enveloped his small father in his embrace, laughing and crying.

"Jean! Jean! You giant! Young Jean Grenon!" Pierre

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babbled incoherently, as he felt the strong muscles of the boy's arms and pounded his broad chest.

"Come, you two . . . eat, eat while things are still hot! There's beer for you, Jean," said Lucie.

As they seated themselves again, Pierre bowed his head an instant over his plate, while the others waited silently. He picked at his food, then ate sparingly, like a man who has known meagre rations. Gradually Marie's absence from the table dawned upon him. "Where is she? Where is your mother? Where is she keeping herself? She lives?"

"Oh . . . *Maman*? Yes . . . ah, yes. . . . But where is she, Lucie?" Jean parried.

"She's in there . . . in her room," declared 'tit Pierre, pointing to her closed door. "She's in there and has been all the time. She stays there all the time . . . now. I could hear her listening at the crack."

"In her room? And didn't come out? Marie! Marie! Come! Don't be mad because I couldn't come before! Come, show me you are glad that I am back at last!" Pierre shouted.

Slowly the door opened and Marie came forth. She stood quietly upon the threshold, exposed as if she were on the cross . . . for all to see. But Pierre did not notice, for he was blinded by his excitement. "Where have you been keeping yourself, my Marie, silly woman, to stay in there pouting . . .?" Pierre stood up and for the first time understood her condition. He continued to stare, disbelieving. Then he blurted out, "So . . . so, that's why? You . . . beast! You were ashamed to show yourself! You . . . at your age, to turn wanton, and shame yourself in the eyes of your own children! Who was he . . . or do you know?"

Lucie wept silently.

"Eat your supper, Papa. We can talk later," urged Jean.

"Who was he, I ask you? Tell me and I will kill him!"

"He is dead already," Joseph put in sullenly. "Dead and buried, thank God for that!"

"You, Jean? You came back to get him?"

"Yes," answered Jean slowly, glancing at his mother, whose mouth twisted in anguish. "Yes, I did, but the little hunchback got ahead of me."

"Will you tell me?" screamed Pierre. "Who was he?"

"Samson!" shouted Marie defiantly. "Samson . . . ! Now you know! You ran away. . . ."

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"You chose well. Samson, the old w'iskey-swilling brute . . . the lumbering bear . . .! And you couldn't wait? It was in your blood, you jade! I recall hearing stories of your grandam. I suppose he overpowered you . . .?"

"No . . . no," confessed Marie. "I went to him. You ought to thank the good Mother Marie for giving us another little one in the place of our little Marie. . . ."

"I suppose I owe you thanks for letting her die? Neglecting her for your own wanton tricks! And now I am to owe you thanks for bringing Samson's brat into the world for the lumbermen to laugh at? Go! Get you out of here and stay out! Go back to the woods where you belong. . . . Go back to the woods and the lumbermen! Take them all!" With a snarl, Pierre rushed at her, his teeth bared, his fists beating the air about her head and shoulders.

Great as she was, Marie retreated in terror, then slipped to her knees. "But it is Marie I nourish within me . . .," she sobbed.

"You she-devil!" Pierre brought his fist across her face, with a blow that nearly unbalanced her, and left its livid mark on her cheek. This only infuriated him the more, and he lifted his fist again.

"Stop that, Papa! Lay off!" Jean commanded him. "No more of that!"

"She is my wife. I can do with her as I will!"

"She is my mother and you will not touch her! Understand? You have seen what I can do to men."

Pierre fell back weakly. "So? But you are right, my son. Great is my sorrow . . . and I had hoped it was ended, when at last I caught sight of my home this afternoon. Why did God visit this upon me? Better far for her to be dead and lying out there with small Marie!" he added fervently.

Lucie helped her mother to her feet. "Sit here," she said to her, and placed a chair near the open door. "Sit here by the lilacs and eat. See? I've made gruel for you and tea from an herb they told me you needed. These, with bread and cress. . . ."

Marie nodded dully, the tears streaming down her cheeks. She was not a pretty sight and Pierre wondered why he had ever loved her. Thoughts repeated themselves in her consciousness like the endless ticking of a clock. . . . "It is all over . . . I am glad. . . . He is angry, but he knows . . . at last . . . I am glad. I should have hurled myself and my shame into the lake . . . but I dared not.

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I dared not murder the child. I was ever a coward, so my grandam used to tell me."

"Eat now," Jean begged his father. "Later we shall talk."

"After a year's wandering to return . . . to this," Pierre groaned, hiding his quivering face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was Sunday, and Pierre and Jean were mending the fence, separating the north meadow from the forest. It would make it more difficult, at least, for the yearlings to stray. Jean had tried to persuade his father to go fishing, but he would only shake his head and say, "I hate the water, *moi!*" The day was hot and neither felt much like working, so they mended a bit here and there, and talked more. Pierre was telling Jean of the tragedy he had experienced . . . as he had told him a dozen times.

"She was a rotten, old thing, standing there on her keel, pretending to be strong, and all the time with her insides decaying. She was dying on her feet . . . ye might say . . . just like an old hag who has lived and loved too well, and who finds herself at the end of life with the lust burned out of her."

Jean nodded. "I know," he said, and he recalled the unclean smells . . . the stink of ancient wood and bilge-water and long-forgotten cargoes . . . and something else, too, something indecent . . . decay and death. Yes, that was it! The smell had carried with it the premonition of death. How well he had recognized it, when he and Andrew had rowed back to her that last night! In the weird moonlight she was a ghost of a ship, looming up against the sky. So Emile had tied his faith to a rotting corpse with a freshly painted face? Might as well sail north on the old lemon-squeezer!

But Pierre was continuing in his monotonous voice, "Yes, she cracked up in the ice like the old bag o' bones she was. I went down . . . we all went down, Emile staring straight ahead and silent as death itself; the Nova Scotian blaspheming like a pirate . . . a wicked man; one poor devil squealing and blubbing; Pat shouting to little Bill, and little Bill praying. I was praying, too, so I couldn't tell what Pat was saying. Only once Emile came to the surface, as I came up . . . we were the only ones . . . the others must have been carried under the ice. Emile was staring straight ahead, piloting his ship he was, but he saw nothing and he made no effort to save himself. I swam toward him, but when I reached the spot, he was no longer there.

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"Then I must have fainted and when I came to, ages had passed, and I was lying there on the ice all alone . . . ice all around me and black water . . . barren wastes of ice as far as I could see, and a black streak of water way out to the horizon. No signs of the wreck. I struggled to my feet and stood swaying with fatigue, trembling with cold, and creaking in my stiff garments, like an ice-coated tree. Desolation! The bleak sky and the ice and the black water, but I made myself look around again and behold! not so far off was the shore . . . and a hut and a thin column of smoke! Never was a sight so welcome! Heaven caught sight of! On my hands and knees I crept toward the smoke, and reached it, and arms caught me and drew me in. And there I lay, between life and death for days.

"Somehow I managed to live, and later I learned that over beyond the rocks and dunes was a small hamlet, a poor thing, but with human beings in it like myself, with little enough to give, but they gave what they had willingly. I lived and worked with them until the ice went out, and the ships came again, and I was able to get passage home. Of all those men, weak and strong, I, the weakest, was saved . . .!"

"Why, you were like him, my father, that giant, Jean-Baptiste, who fought his way through the ice, across the Great River to safety!" Jean cried. "Sure . . . him!"

"And I came home," reiterated Pierre gloomily. "Home! And I find the lumbermen have moved in from the forest . . . to my very door . . . no, into my home and bed! She, Jezebel, dwells in my house and nourishes within her the child of one of them. My Marie, who has betrayed me! The lumbermen will laugh in my face and behind my back. When I go to water the old mare they will stand grinning beyond the fence. When I bid her stay home with her shame, and go out to pick berries or see to the sap . . . woman's work! . . . there they will be, leering from behind the trunks of great trees. Coli-of-the-singing-axe will mock me. That Coli who would not have dared last year!"

"Ah, no, Coli will not mock you. He will not laugh, for Barnabé is dead. Coli's axe sings no more in the forest. It falls with a dead sound."

"But he will stare at me with reproachful eyes, as if I had caused Barnabé's death."

Jean shook his head and rubbed his powerful hands together. "And Samson is dead. *He* can do no more harm."

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"Samson! Harm enough he has done! He has ruined us!"

"Little Marie is dead, too," mourned Jean. "Samson! . . . I could have wrung his neck! He killed Marie. . . ."

Pierre winced. He gazed out over the green water of the lake. Almost a year ago he and Jean had started forth in the well-filled dory, with the goose and the butchered hog; the skins and the slim allowance of bagosse . . . oh, and the iron pot for the smudge-fires. An ill-omened journey it had proved to be. Misfortune had attended, like an evil spirit, from the first . . . almost from the time their feet had struck the narrow deck of the bastard windjammer. What had happened to him, who had boasted before he left that he must live ever near the water! Where else could he fish? Empty boasting! He hated the water, alive and sparkling coolly beneath the sun, as it was to-day, or frozen and still, ominous beneath its leaden surface, a desert of ice as far as the eye could see. God! It had cast its spell over Jean, too. That's why he hated it! Day after day he perceived the boy gazing wistfully into the distance, and the old squaw had said, "He will roam the rivers made by God and man, and he will return, but too late . . . for you. . . ." To late indeed! Little Marie slept behind the church beside the eternally young, still-born infant, who had followed Jean-Ba into the world within a ten-month. And Marie-Blanche and Samson . . . and, he wondered, how many others. . . .

Pierre hated the water and all it had done to him. When Marie's time had passed and she was around once more, he would move away, back beyond the mountains; away from the men who leered, away from the ashes of Samson, away from the glistening roadstead which might one day lead Jean-Ba back to the canal or on to the sea. He must cling with all his feeble strength to Jean! Dear Jean, nearest his own generation!

Why couldn't the good Lord have sent him back sooner? In time to grab up an axe and cleave the skull of that fat-necked brute! Curse his luck and his small size, the gift of his little mother! And yet he alone had been saved from a terrible death and brought back here, too late to avenge his wrongs. He burned to beat his woman, beat this great, strapping, middle-aged wench until she bawled . . . then to show her he was still a man!

Had there not been stories about her grandmother, the fat Tinni? The wanton! He should have stayed home last summer and watched her! Verily she had warned him. She had said, "These lumbermen! Bah! They fill the forest with their noise,

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shouting, swearing, chopping all day long . . . full of bagosse, swarming like ants over their mountains of saw-dust!" He had trusted her too well, for she was the mother of his grown-up children, and so he had gone away. He had loved her . . . he loved her even now!

He could see it all in retrospect, how fate had woven the web, enticing Jean-Ba away; tricking Emile and sending them all to their watery graves; entangling his Marie in its sticky filaments; crushing 'tite Marie. "Mind you bring Jean back with you," Marie had warned him, "And mind you bring yourself back, too!"

He had come back, but too late. So she had suspected it all the time . . . her desire? His Marie, that great, strapping girl, who had loved their children wildly, but who had shamed herself before them and must shame herself in their eyes till the end of her days! He left Jean and rushed up the hill away from it all. He wanted to be alone somewhere to think. He stumbled past the fenced-in, rocky acre where the pigs were rooting contentedly under the wind-blown scrub-apple trees, which hugged the side of the slope. Pigs! There would be six young hogs to slaughter in the fall.

"Where are you going?" Jean yelled after him, but he did not answer.

Out of sight, over a stone-wall he clambered into the maple-orchard. There was a bucket young Pierre had forgotten . . . the rancid, sticky mess inside. Up the narrow path, a path he hardly recognized, lately unused, and grass growing to heal the scars of treading feet! Like the ancient trail-blazer, he hurried on, never faltering, and suddenly he came out upon a cleared space, crossed a brook, kicked aside a rusty trap with the rotten carcass of a musk-rat in it, and faced Samson's shack. So? And Marie had worn the path? Pierre leaned against its flimsy side, gasping for breath, his heart hammering within his tortured breast, sweat pouring down his face. The long illness in the north had taken its toll. Pierre closed his eyes wearily until the vertigo had passed.

Then he pushed open the swollen door and passed inside. On the table a few dishes; in the corner by the hearth a jug of bagosse, half full. Pierre poured some into the mug and drank, and felt better when the fiery liquid struck his stomach. He poured out more bagosse and drank, then grabbing up the pallet of soiled blankets and skins . . . this their bed! . . . he stuffed them in the fire-place and reached for the tinder-box. The bedding burned slowly, for it was damp, but the skins were dry and they blazed. Then he caught sight of the whale-oil lamp and scarcely knowing

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what he did, poured its contents upon the fire. A slender stream ran across the floor and the fire followed its course. Pierre's eyes blazed. Ah! So? Sure! Snatching the rickety bench and stool he smashed them against the wall and piled the splintered wood in the path of the blazing oil. He watched the spoliation hungrily; the flames licking the floor, mounting the walls. A fiery hell for Samson's wicked soul! Flames all about him! About to destroy him, the avenger! No! He jumped aside as they licked at his boots, and dashed through the holocaust to the door . . . just in time, for the flames chased his retreating figure, roaring their anger at their escaping victim, singeing his hair and face.

Pierre rushed, panting, down the path and never stopped running until he had cleared the stone-wall and come to the bars of the pasture, where the old mare stood dozing, and the oxen patiently chewed their cud. He slumped down against the bars and the mare nosed him gently. With futile hands he tried to push her away, the old, white ghost. "Marie! Marie!" he sobbed. Weariness overwhelmed him and he rolled over and slept.

Pierre woke to find Jean and Henri shaking him. The sombre blue of the crepuscule had descended, dulling contours and bringing the mountains nearer to the lake. He peered about him blindly. . . .

"Come, Father, get up," Henri was importuning him. "Come, make haste!"

"We have searched for you everywhere," Jean reproved him.

Suddenly the heavy smell of burnt forest and smoke assailed Pierre's nostrils. He leaned back against the bars and tried to remember.

"Come," begged Jean. "We've got to get home. We've been fighting the forest-fire, and we feared you had been caught in it and perished. It swept down the hillside and spread to the camp before they could stop it. Somebody smoking, they said." He drew his father to his feet and the two brothers supported him to the house. There in the lamp-light, Jean saw his scorched hair and face, and Henri pointed silently to the boots. "Wash up, Father," urged Jean hastily. "Henri, you go bury the boots."

"Jean-Ba, I burned his shack . . . I . . .!"

"Hush! Don't open your mouth about this to anyone. The men were tired and angry. Understand?"

Pierre nodded weakly.

"Lucie, bring a drink of bagosse . . . and bring the goose-grease, too."

CHAPTER XXXIV

JULY brought oppressive heat and violent storms, which roared over the mountains and shattered the pitch black sky with flashes of yellow fire. The waters of the lake grew sullen, then angry, and lashed themselves to fury. Rain fell in leaden sheets. The storm would spend itself at last, and for a time the panting earth was cooled.

Marie-Blanche crawled out of the hot seclusion of her room, dragged herself out of doors, and lay, half-sitting, half-reclining on the ground. Sometimes she walked as far as the edge of the wood and bathed her swollen feet in the brook. Her time was near and she dreaded it for the first time in her normal existence. Each day brought further discomfort and each sleepless night was spent, lying there alone . . . for Pierre slept at the other end of the house . . . waiting until dawn brought the heavy stupor. She tried to pretend it was all a nightmare, from which she would awake with the light of another day.

One evening the ancient squaw appeared over the crest of the hill, and without a word, deposited her bundle and prepared to stay. Had she come by canoe, had she walked, or had she flown on the wings of the wind? Nobody knew, and she was strangely reticent. She waved the others aside and, crouched before the hearth, she concocted magic potions from herbs, which she handed to Marie and bade her drink. And Pierre noticed that the heat drew no sweat from the dried-up mummy of her body. Queer, this old hag!

"Did you send for her?" Jean asked.

"Not I."

"Nor I."

"It is well. She is a wise woman. She knows . . . she knows all things." Pierre turned to her. "See? I am back."

"I knew you would come . . . and the strong, young one, too, but too late," she muttered, glancing at Marie. "My old mother, who died when she was twenty and a hundred . . . verily . . . once told me of a squaw, not young was she, who lusted with an-

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other when her brave was away at war. They burned her at the stake . . . and the babe with her. The blood must be kept pure. . . ."

Marie shuddered.

"Be still!" commanded Pierre, but the tremble in his voice showed his agitation. "We . . . we are not Injuns."

The old woman seated herself by the fire and drew her pipe from her voluminous skirts. Jean handed over his tobacco. Pierre's mind reverted to that time so long ago and again he imagined the smell of death.

In the cool of evening two days later, Jean climbed the ridge behind the red barns, and below him, bathed in moon-mist, he saw valleys and mountains looming dimly in the distance, like giant sand-piles evolved by the Manitou. Before him was the shimmering lake, quick-silver where the moon streaked across it, and beyond, further than the eye could see, was the yawning chasm of the river, leading out to sea. Jean knew he must go back there some day soon, when things got straightened out here at home. When? he wondered.

Only this morning, he had overheard Lucie asking the squaw about the child. "You . . . you know all things, so my father says. Tell me—think you this child . . . this stranger will live? Maybe it will die. Nights in my dreams I see it dead . . . crumpled . . . somehow . . . not human. Dead, but not dead. . . . It frightens me. . . . Oh, I am afraid!"

"You, my child, are blessed with a gift of second sight," she answered. "Ah, yes, it will live, cursed as it is. It will live a living death. You will wish it dead many times, but it will live to be a burden to you. It will always remind you that your father came back too late. . . ."

"Hush! Don't speak of that," warned Lucie.

"It will live."

"It will come soon?" Lucie begged.

"Before the morrow dawns."

And Jean walked away.

All day Pierre had moved morosely about the farm, laboring, but to no purpose. Henri must rush to pick up the fork he had let slip through nerveless fingers; Joseph must grab the bucket and feed the pigs. Even Jean had stayed away from the camp, not to help, but to lend moral support to his father, for he had arrived at man's estate and at last the two men understood each other.

Marie's pains started and not since Jean was born, had she

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cried out so loudly. Bringing Samson's child into the world was tearing her asunder. Pierre pretended to show little concern. This great Marie bawling because she was a woman and must work out a woman's destiny! Besides, had she not wished this fate on herself? He blustered before the others. At each cry Jean winced, and finally, when night had fallen and the babe was not yet come, he sneaked out of the house, supperless, and sought solitude, far from the birth-pangs of a sinning woman. Out here under the sky there was no longer need to stuff his ears. Only the moon-mist above and far below, the water; mountains protecting him and the murmuring silence of nature. Somewhere in the distance hounds bayed. A rabbit screamed. A tottering tree crashed and went tumbling down the chasm. Ah, Samson! Clouds slid across the face of the moon . . . green . . . black . . . lined with gold. A giant lumbered through the sky. . . . Ah, never! But, yes, a man carrying a stinking cadaver of a hog slung over his shoulder. Jean threw back his head and shouted, and the hills sent back the echoes. He remembered the snivelling Jew to whom he had sold the rotting hog-meat, and the gnome he had seen in the heavens at Tadousac. Laughter froze in his heart, and regret came. The hunchback, horrible creature, hobbling across space! Barnabé! God! Jean closed his eyes and when he dared venture another glance, the moon had emerged and the cripple had vanished into the murky blue. He stretched out on his back and gazed up at the stars. They reminded him, as did everything near the lake, of 'tite Marie. Dancing in the wind, singing with the wind-mill, laughing at the ripples on the joyous water, weeping crystal tears when snow-flakes melted on lashes and cheeks. Marie! Then he thought of the cool, green water and of the naiad, Jessie. Where was she now? What was she doing? Was she thinking of him . . . waiting for him?

Jean kicked savagely at a stone, lying mutely by his side, and bit his lips to keep back the tears. All the things he had planned for himself and Jessie! Would they ever come true? He, but last year, a grand man, going forth to conquer worlds, to live dramas! Why, he had run away from it all! And drama had flown back here on evil wings and settled beside the lake, and like a powerful magnet had dragged him back to taste its dregs. But the other river was beckoning, and bye and bye he would answer its summons. He would go to Jessie, if he had to run

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away again. He rolled over, pillowed his head in his arms and slept.

Rays of the rising sun woke him. He rubbed his eyes, scrambled to his feet and walked down the hillside. There he found Joseph and Henri milking, and 'tit Pierre staggering under the bucket of slops for the hogs. He grabbed it from the child's hand and swung it to his shoulder. Hog-meat and the hunchback! He must not think of it, or he could not eat. Funny of him to be so squeamish! He should never have cheated the Jew . . . Emile had told him. Maybe that had brought all their bad luck? He stuck his head in the stable-door. "Well," he said, "Has it come?"

His father was standing there, idle, and now he nodded miserably. "Go, see for yourself, and never more mention such a monster to me! It's not Samson's after all, but Barnabé's. . . ."

"What say you? No . . . never! It could not be!"

"Go and see for yourself," Pierre replied gloomily. "*Hélas*, that I should live to see this day!"

Jean strode into the house, and saw that Lucie was weeping as she set the table. From the threshold of Marie's chamber, the Indian motioned to the youth, and he tiptoed over to join her. Spent by her night of pain, Marie lay there, wan in the pale sunlight, and sheltering in the crook of her massive arm, the newborn child. She looked wistfully at Jean. "My 'tite Marie," she whimpered. "The Virgin promised to send me. . . ."

"'T is a man-child," croaked the squaw.

"So, it is true . . . my little Marie is dead . . . really dead, and all this time I have carried a stranger?" she sobbed.

The Indian stooped and threw aside the blanket which covered the child, and lifted the purple, malformed body for Jean to see. The mother hid her face. Not little Marie, but a boy with grotesque, spider-legs! The squaw seated herself on her haunches, and turning the child on its stomach across her lap, anointed it with goose-grease. It was then Jean caught sight of the cruel hump between its narrow, little shoulders, which twisted the body and threw the head to one side. Instantly he recalled the vision . . . the dwarf throwing his gross body in a half-circle with each step . . . humpy . . . hump . . . hump . . . And he had forgiven him for his loose speech, and had cradled him in his arms when he was breathing his last! "Barnabé . . . you? Barnabé!" Jean cried out.

"No! No! Why do you say that?" sobbed Marie wildly. "It

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is Samson's and mine . . . this son! I told you Barnabé was the devil, and he set his ugly mark upon this innocent, little one! Look you at the pointed ears and the crooked back . . . all his evil doing! A man-cripple and not my child, Marie! She is bewitched. They have taken her away from me and have left this . . . this . . . but I will take care of him! I! Get out of my sight, you strong one, son of Pierre! The babe is mine . . . all mine, since his father died. Do you hear? You, Jean, and the others who hate me?" And she rose from her bed.

"Lie still," commanded Jean.

"Do," said the Indian, swaddling the child and placing it back in bed. "You have had a hard time of it, for you are no longer young . . . 't were well to remember. Spare yourself."

"Come, lie down," urged Jean more gently, and thankfully she acceded, for she was weary. "Ah, my Mother," whispered Jean. "We must make the best of it. See . . . he has a wise face, the little one, old beyond his years. Perhaps he is the good Barnabé born again. I saw him die, and now I see him born again. We shall learn to love him . . . you and I and the others. Maybe even Papa . . . in time."

"He? Never! He will never forgive me. He will carry his hate to the grave with him."

"In time, for he is good," whispered Jean.

The child cried lustily. "Strong lungs he has," laughed Jean. "Rest now, and perhaps you will be up and about to-morrow for the bread-baking. Who knows? Out in the sunshine . . . with your burden gone."

The Indian crouched close by the fire, and smoke spiralled from her foul pipe. "The child will live," she mumbled, as if setting a curse upon Marie-Blanche. "And she will care for him to the end of her days. My lad, far better to hurl him down the mountain-side . . . or expose him to the mercy of the wild beasts, as the Indians. . . ."

"Be still! We will care for him," interrupted Jean, gazing fearfully at his mother.

"You will care for him? Ah, you . . . you who will leave soon to seek life at the ends of the water-roads . . . on rivers made by God and man. You will sail again the broad rivers and the narrow rivers, my son."

"Sure . . . some time," he admitted dreamily.

"Breakfast is ready. Go call the others. You will not leave

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us . . . not soon, Jean-Ba? You will not go away . . . please!" Lucie begged tearfully.

"Perhaps . . . some time. Don't be sad, my sister. Why, sure, I am going to make my fortune in brave, gold coins! I will bring you back fine clothes and ear-bobs set with bright stones . . . like those I saw in the great city . . . and bracelets with bangles, for you and little Jessie. I must tell you about Jessie. Some day I shall marry her and you will come to visit us. You will find us living in our own fine boat . . . somewhere. . . ."

"Have you got a boat?"

"No, but I will have one. I will give you bangles. You will like that? Bangles for your wrists and Jessie's, and coins to carry in your reticules. Yes, I will get you one of those, like the fine ladies carry. And a high comb for *Maman* to wear in her hair."

The squaw mumbled to herself.

"Sure," said Jean enthusiastically. "Some time. . . ."

"I thought you would stay with us," mourned Lucie.

"I would keep him here!" declared Pierre, entering the house. "Perhaps . . . who knows? I will move away . . . back into the hills, away from the water and its curse, as soon as Marie is up and about."

"The boy will go," said the squaw, and Pierre bowed his head.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE hot, sticky days in camp began to pall. Lumbermen, goaded beyond endurance by *les maringouins* and *les brûlots*, tortured by the heat, bathed in sweat, were irritable, savage, forever picking quarrels. Jean kept away from the others, even from Coli. It rested him to run off by himself and gaze out over the Lake, longing poignantly for the sweet-smelling dampness of Ma Billings' cabins; the sluggish lapping of waters of the old ditch, close to his drowsy head; and the cool of the evenings. The pain of his yearning for other scenes and other people, eased the smarting of the gnat-bites. He longed for Lancy and his banter, for Andrew, for Lem and his patient scolding, for Ma, for Mr. Billings . . . even for old Adam . . . and, most of all, for little Jessie. Did she still love him? He could still feel the pressure of her arms about his neck, choking him . . . that pressure from which he had wrenched himself so ruthlessly, bidding her, like a great fool, to wait! Yet what else could he have done? He could not have faced a new life with her here . . . not with his mother as she had been, his mother released from the burden of her sin, only to have the burden of its fruit forever before her eyes . . . forever a load on her generous heart. No . . . that could not have been! He and Jessie must wait.

But he was going back . . . and soon. And, as if in answer to his longing, he received a note, painfully penned by Lancy under Andy's direction:—

"When you comin' back we'd like to know. We ain't heard from you. How did you find the folks. We are well an hope this finds you the same. Lem says tell you to come back before the rush starts in this fall. Adam died last spring. I guess you aint heard an we are short of hands. Ma says she guesses Adam went to find his datter an we must be glad for him, poor old thing. Give our respects to the famly an we hope you will come back soon. Andy says tell you Jess is fine an she has growed so pretty an hopes to see you soon. She told me so too. She says tell him to come back—I'm waitin. Asaph and Lem plans to be in Whitehall again in Sept. Will hope to see you then.

Your friend Lancy."

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Jean labored lovingly over the note, spelling it out carefully, before he tucked it away inside his shirt, and the next Sunday, he made excuses to row to St. Joseph d'Alma, ostensibly to go to mass, but in reality to consult the priest about a few of the puzzling words. He didn't quite trust his own English, and he must not lose a phrase of this precious document!

"Mind you come back to us," cautioned his mother.

"Why . . . sure. . . ."

"Well, then, let 'tit Pierre go with you." Pierre was a mere baby. Jean would have to bring *him* back! But she waited for him to demur.

"Sure," he agreed carelessly. "Get your things on."

And the note proved to be all that he had expected. He was going . . . going . . . going! His heart sang this song to the even dip-dip of the oars. Soon he would be sailing down the Saguenay, up the St. Lawrence, up the Champlain to its head, which joined the muddy old canal, and there they would be waiting for him. Asaph and Ma Billings would be there; and Lem, Lancy and Andy; Casey and Maggie . . . all his friends. Then one night he would see the great hulk of the Nellie Z, bumping the edge of the Basin. "Jessie!" he spoke her name aloud.

"*Hein?*" asked Pierre. "What you say?"

"Nothing," and he rowed along a little faster. They must get home in time for supper.

He must be off again, living his own life! There was no longer any need for him here at home. Henri would be only too glad to fill his job in the forest; and his father had resumed his place as head of the house. No need for him to hang around, pretending to guard his mother, not since the other night, when Grande Marie and Pierre had fought, side by side, for the frail life of the deformed, little one. Better off dead, the old squaw had said, but they had fought to save him. They had dipped him in a hot bath, till his convulsions had ceased; then hour after hour, till the cock crew, they had watched and prayed over the little, sleeping child. Hand in hand, they had knelt before his cradle. Thus Jean and Lucie had found them, and sent them off to bed. And Jean had seen his mother press her trembling lips to Pierre's hand. "You are good," she whispered. Pierre raised her up gently and bade her rest. He would watch.

But, no, the child was saved, she assured him. But, see, he was

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sleeping quietly. They would go together to rest, so Pierre had regained his Grande Marie.

Now Jean wanted Jessie, and he rolled up the remnants of his pink shirt and the two new, blue ones, and the socks his mother had knit for him, together with a tie or two and his blue cambric handkerchief, and boldly announced his intentions at breakfast.

"I am ready . . . *moi!*"

"Ready?" wailed his mother.

"For what? Where to?" gasped Pierre.

"The States," grumbled Joseph, gloomily.

"Oh, but, yes, back there . . . to the canal . . . the river . . . some day, the sea . . . to my girl I leave behind me."

"Girl? You have not told us about any girl," whispered Marie-Blanche. "Who is she . . . this girl?"

Pierre said never a word, for in his heart he knew.

"Only Lucie . . . she knows."

Lucie bowed her head and her eyes filled with tears. "He loves her, *Maman*. He is a grown man . . . it is but natural."

"He is young," said Marie mournfully. "You will marry her?"

"Soon, I hope."

"Tell us," urged Pierre, his hands trembling.

"She is Tim's girl . . . his niece. Remember I tell you about Tim? He has the big boat, the Nellie Z, a grand barge . . . biggest on the Champlain," he boasted. "Me and Jessie, we are plighted."

"Is she . . . pretty?" asked Lucie.

"Like a star . . . little . . . far-away, and her eyes shine like the stars. Her hair is black and light as a cloud that dips to meet itself in the water. . . ."

"In the water?" queried his father, puzzled.

"Oh, but, yes, . . . well," he laughed, self-consciously. "I was thinking of that day when I go to swim, and see her, sitting there in the pool. She bent over to see herself, as in a glass. . . ."

Marie's eyes grew dreamy. She undertood. "I know," she said. "You love her." She got up and walked to the window with its commanding view of the lake. Pierre's eyes follow her sadly. Was she going to be happy . . . his Marie . . . ever happy? She turned to face them again. "I know . . . you marry her and bring her back here to live with us, that we may be reunited once more. I will love her as one of my own. You will, Jean, please?"

"I don't know. . . ."

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"It is written," Pierre reminded her.

"Ah, *Dieu*, that old savage! What do I care for her? I will live in spite of her, and have my own with me! He must bring her back to us and we shall live together in happiness . . . all of us!" she insisted.

"Some time . . . perhaps," Jean promised. "But, when, I cannot say. I must be there . . . I must meet them in the early fall. . . ."

"What?"

"They will be waiting for me."

"I will not let you go!"

"God speed you on your way," acquiesced Pierre. "But, see you, Marie, he has his work to do, his life to live . . . there . . . as we must live ours here. . . ."

Marie bowed her head and wept.

"*Moi*, I will go with him!" Henri shouted.

"No," refused his father. "Not yet. Wait till you are older. Wait till he returns for you. . . ."

"That may be never."

"You will row to Robervál?"

"To Chicoutimi."

"*Eh bien*, let Joseph go with you, to bring back the boat . . . and the old smudge-pot we left there last year."

"Yes, *la boucone* . . . we need it," said Marie, once more the careful housewife.

"Joseph can bring the boat back, and he needs the change, tied down as he has been. Maybe you can sell my skins, eh, Joseph? Mark, you, Jean, he's a Grenon and will drive a shrewd bargain. But, look you, Joseph, don't you break an Indian's neck to get his gold. Remember, Jean?"

"Ah, *oui*, I smash him one!" Only a short year ago, thought Jean.

"Yes, send Joseph. He's dependable. He will return to his mother," agreed Marie, smiling at him shyly.

"Yes, *Maman*," said Joseph hoarsely, and left the room, his heart too full of gratitude.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ONE afternoon in September Jean might have been seen standing on the deck of a fussy, black tug, as she skirted the Elbow and approached the dock. Watery space, lying between boat and land, diminished, and she eased alongside, her siren snorting its greeting to the few who were loitering on the dock. Jean stooped to pick up his bag, which he had bought in Montreal, and into which he had stuffed his new shoes, two flannel shirts and a black and white mackinaw, the gift of his father. Henri had accepted the red lumber-jacket, along with Jean's job.

Jean scanned each face closely. Surely Andy or Lance would be among those waiting in the sun, but he recognized no one. What if he were too late? What if they had got tired of waiting and had pulled out? His heart missed a beat. The skipper rolled up beside of him, swore musically as the tug bumped, and lifted his cap to scratch his bristling pate. He replaced the cap, pushing it far over his eyes to protect them from the sun. "Hot," he remarked.

"Sure," answered Jean, impatient to be off.

"Say, boy, ye'd oughter to stay with us. Come on . . . change yer mind! It's a fair job I'm offerin' ye, an' they's a future in it fer a smart, young feller like you.

"Thanks, but I gotta be goin' on. Mist' Billin's, he's expectin' me."

"Ye—ah, so ye said, but I can't see fer the life o' me what's attractin' ye about these here ol' tows. Me, I like to be in front with the tugs. Mebbe ye're right to stick by yer promise, but if they ain't there . . . if they should 'a left, why, ye can come back to us. We'll be leavin' tomorrer fer Ti."

"Well . . . thanks. Goo'-bye. . . ."

"Good luck."

Jean swung over the plank and down the dusty path. A small, gaudily marked snake slithered out of his way, into the tall grass. Jean picked up a stick, slung his bag over it and marched on, sprinting now in his hurry to reach the Slip and catch sight of

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Asaph's boats. Perhaps they had gone? He had been delayed several days, waiting for a boat to take him up the Champlain, and it was only by the grace of God the old skipper of the tug had consented to take him on. His mate had summer-dysentery. But five days late! He almost wept before his certain defeat.

Then suddenly he came to the Basin and stared eagerly, his heart beating wildly. Gone! Sure! Well, maybe they were tied up by the bridge. No . . . he must be blind or crazy! There were three boats . . . no, eight down there by the locks, and as his eyes became aware of the familiar outlines, he recognized Asaph's string. He stood in his tracks and yelled, "*Holà! Holà!*" and Skene sent back a jovial reply. "*Holà,*" he shouted to the old lemon-squeezer, resplendent in a fresh coat of most amazing green. Surely somebody had been joking to paint her up like that! And there near her ugly nose was his name, "Jean" in bright yellow letters. "*Holà!*" he sobbed with joy, and dashed forward.

A red head lifted itself lazily from the shady side of the cabin . . . Andrew! . . . who sprang to his feet. "Hey, Asaph! . . . Lem! . . . Hey, Lance, come 'ere! Asaph, it's him! It's the boy! I told ye he'd come, if ye'd only wait a minute! Hey, Johnny, golly, I'm glad to see ye! Ain't I told ye, Lem, he'd be here, when ye was all het-up about startin'?"

Such a hand-shaking, back-slapping, feeling of hard, young muscles, as there was; and then Ma emerged and brushed them all aside and fell to kissing Jean. "Biscuits an' honey to-night, my boy, an' the grandest choc'late cake ye ever did see," she whispered tearfully.

"We're loadin' slate, John," said Asaph, trying to be matter-of-fact.

"An', as usual, Lance, here's just blew in from the Yule, loaded inside an' out with rum-booze, I expect," drawled Lem.

"That ain't the truth! I only had one lager to cool me off. He's mad 'cause a *Vermont* Yank cheated him on a load this mornin'. Lem's gettin' awful slow-witted . . . somehow he can't figger accurate no more."

"Gosh, it's swell to see ye," laughed Andrew. "We bin lone-some since Adam left us. We bin wishin'. . . How's yer Maw? We got the note the priest wrote about yer comin' back mebbe, an' was we glad?"

"Ma could hardly wait," said Asaph.

"Ye must tell us all about ev'rything" urged Lem.

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But Mrs. Billings saw Jean's face grow serious. "He means when ye get rested, Johnny. Come on now an' get washed up. It'll be supper-time 'fore we know it."

"Casey an' Maggie left yestiddy," said Andy, following Jean into the cabin of the lemon-squeezer. "Boy, ye look diff'runt somehow. Ye've kind o' growed up since we seen ye . . . growed up, all of a sudden. How'd ye leave the folks?"

"Oh . . . fine . . . now. Someday I tell ye. How's Jessie?"

"Oh, her? Thought ye might be askin'. She's here. Tim's tied up down by the bridge. But ye can't go now . . . not till after supper. Mis' Billin's bin plannin' . . ."

"Sure . . . I know. I wait all summer . . . I can wait little while longer," and Jean sat down on the edge of his bunk to remove his shoes. "Nice . . . here," he sighed, burying his face in Ma's calico curtains, smelling, as they always did, of canal-damp.

"It's a great life . . . peaceful . . . sort of eternal, too. I don't mind sayin' it's got me . . . sort o'. I ain't wanderin' no more, anyhow. Lem says it's Mis' Billin's' cookin' . . ."

"It's water. She gets ye. . . ."

"*It* gets ye, Johnny, not 'she'. Don't forget yer English."

"It's the water," Jean repeated, as he rose to strip off his shirt and pants.

"Hey, lemme get ye a pailful! There's the tub I bought me in the city."

Under the admiring scrutiny of Andrew, Jean bathed his glorious head and body, and Andy laughed as the boy shook showers from his mane of sunburnt hair. "Gosh, I'd clean forgot how big ye are! Been fightin' any?"

"Some."

"Ye're sure diff'runt, Johnny, but kind o' the same, too. . . ."

A horn blared out its summons. "That's Ma callin' us to supper. Hustle up an' get yer things on."

Jean fussed through his new bag, spilling the contents over the floor, for Andrew to pick up. He finally decided on the pink shirt with the patched tail. "Here's yer pants," offered Andrew.

"Same ol' snake," laughed Jean, as they swung up the steps and off down the tow-path to the Sary-Ann. "The lemon-squeezer, she wriggle under ye, like always. . . ."

"Sure, that's Peddy's meanness stickin' to her, but she's sure snug."

Down in the trim cabin of the Sary-Ann, all hands were stand-

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ing about, self-consciously, waiting for something to happen. Jean's nostrils quivered sensitively . . . biscuits and coffee and a smell of chops frying!

"Well," said Ma. "It's good to be together again," and at that the cambric curtains, which hid her bed from view, parted, and out popped Jessie.

She pulled the curtains to behind her and stood there, smiling gravely . . . lovelier than ever, and so sure of her loveliness. Woman!

Jean just stood still and looked at her, as if he would never get enough.

"Well," she said. "Why don't you say something?"

"I come back . . . you see?" Jean said quietly. "Like I say. . . ."

Jessie rushed to him. "Oh, I know . . . I know!" she cried, and Jean grabbed her and held her aloft, high enough to gaze into her eyes.

"I come back to you an' now we get married."

Jessie hugged his damp head and squealed, "Oh, put me down . . . put me down, Johnny . . .!"

"We get married," he insisted.

"Not till spring, Uncle says, . . . an' I'm learnin' to play the melodeon."

"We get married now all the same," bellowed Jean.

"Not till I'm seventeen, Uncle says. . . . That'll be in January. . . ."

"But, you promise," insisted Jean.

"Johnny, it'll be best for both of you to wait. You gotta be earnin' an' savin', an' Jessie's gotta get her things together. . . ."

"Well, mebbe in the winter," Jessie whispered in his ear.

"A long time," he said reluctantly.

"And now put me down," she demanded, a new note of authority in her voice.

"She wants ye should see her new gown," Lance put in.

"Oh, you, Lancy, an' I wanted him to notice it for himself!"

"I thought he was goin' to eat ye up."

Jean set her on her feet with a bounce, and stared. Such a vision! Why, she, too, had grown up over-night. This young lady in her smart tarlatan frock, Jessie? And the store shoes, too! Her cloud of gypsy-black hair was brushed carefully in back of

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her pale ears, which showed off to perfection the golden doves . . . his doves . . . with the glass cherries in their beaks.

Jean swallowed hard. He was afraid of her. He had left behind him a scrawny, shy girl, and he returned to find a woman in her place, beautiful, enigmatic, exotic with her gypsy hair . . . a woman altogether sure of herself, and fascinating.

Jessie, wise as women are wise, read his thoughts, and giggled an abashed, little giggle, then clung to his arm, quite surrendering to the superior strength of her master, man. "Oh, Johnny, I haven't changed a bit . . . not the least, tiny bit, Johnny . . . only I guess I love ye more! Honest, I'm just the same," she pleaded.

Jean gazed down into her eyes and knew that it was so.





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